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contents May 2015

features

58 ►

Your Daily Tread

Lace up your boots: Here's our new list of must-do hikes within a few hours' drive of 12 major American cities.

EDITED BY CASEY LYONS

72

Kindergarten Can Wait

Thru-hiking a 2,000-mile trail might be one of the toughest feats of endurance in the outdoors. Just don't tell this five year old.

BY BILL DONAHUE

84

The Upgrade: Gear Closet

Big space or small, get organized with these expert tips.

BY MAREN HORJUS

86

Catch Me If You Can

Our man journeys to the maze-like canyons around Navajo Mountain on the trail of a Diné headman who evaded the U.S. Army and became a legend.

BY DAVID ROBERTS

Cover Cathedral Peak, Yosemite National Park, CA, by Grant Ordelheide.
Beta: page 96

PHOTO BY LAURENCE PARENT

Tom's Thumb Trail, AZ

62



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contents

May 2015



35

the play list

14 Columbia River Gorge, OR Find a spring wildflower stash.

16 The Experience: First Night of the New Season It might be chilly—but you won't regret it.

18 Volcanic Tablelands, CA Hike to Sierra petroglyphs.

19 Point Reyes National Seashore, CA Score an ocean view over one of the Lower 48's two tidefalls.

20 Done in a Day: Adrenaline Hikes Thrill seekers will love these four scrambly trips.

22 Life List: Scotland's Top Long Trail Wander through the legendary highlands.

24 Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, UT Get lost amid hoodoos, slots, and arches.

26 Insider's Guide: Great Basin, NV Ancient pines and

alpine lakes await in America's quietest national park.

28 Weekends Hike part of the Mountains-To-Sea Trail in North Carolina, create your own path in Arizona's Petrified Forest National Park, and explore South Dakota's badlands.



26 51



the manual

skills

35 Stay Dry in a Storm

Enjoy spring rain with these expert tips.

36 Cheat Sheet: Navigation 8 ways to stay on track

38 Pass/Fail: Make a DIY Pack Sewing your own gear is about as hard as it sounds.

40 Trail Chef: 3-Ingredient Meals Easy has never been so tasty.

42 Photo School: Wildlife Portrait Zoom in on animals.

survival

45 Out Alive: Hypothermic

An Alaska hiker pulls through a blizzard—barely.

48 Saved By: Trees Make shelter, fire, and more with this abundant resource.

49 Den Mother: Snake Bite Handle backcountry venom.

gear

51 Hydration Packs

6 field-proven picks

54 Hammocks

Ultralight to ultra-

stormproof

56 Field Notes

Tester picks and tips

8 editor's note

10 #trailchat

96 uncovered



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THE OUTDOORS AT YOUR DOORSTEP



STAFF PICKS Age when I first went backpacking*

5; Trinity Alps
Wilderness, CA

15; in Maine with
Outward Bound

21; Porcupine Mountains,
MI, with my future
husband

22; Emigrant
Wilderness, CA,
with my future
husband

20; Allegheny National Forest,
PA, with my future husband
and a malfunctioning stove

14; Philmont Scout
Ranch, NM

14; Wind River Range, WY

23; on the AT in
Pennsylvania as
a BACKPACKER
photo intern

21; Superior Hiking Trail, MN.
It was a "cleansing" trip for
a friend who had gone through
a breakup. We packed heavy
on the whiskey, not so much
the backpacking skills.

Go to backpacker
.com/fieldscouts
for their weekly
reports.

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II; Delaware Water Gap, PA,
with Girl Scout Cadettes

5; Adirondacks, NY

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13; Mt. St. Helens, WA

25; Flat Top
Wilderness, CO. We
crossed a scary ledge.
I cried. Afterward, I
was so proud I started
planning my next trip.

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*For comparison, Christian Thomas, 7, has backpacked
nearly 5,000 miles—and counting. Our story about the
record-setting thru-hiker begins on page 72.

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CONFIDENT WHEN IT MATTERS

editor's note

BY DENNIS LEWON



Way off trail in Death Valley's Grapevine Mountains

Stash the Map

Sometimes a little mystery is just what a hike needs.

THE STEEP SLOPE consisted of rock shards held together by crumbly dirt. If the stuff had a name, it would be something like crap-you-shouldn't-climb. Nevertheless, a few friends and I scrambled up the 100-foot canyon wall, going one at a time to avoid the gritty shrapnel launched by the companion above.

We were in Death Valley National Park, last fall, looking for a natural bridge in the Grapevine Mountains. The search was not going well.

The bridge, discovered in 2013, is not marked on any maps. We had enough beta to get started, but apparently not enough to finish the job. The sun was getting lower, the terrain steeper and more treacherous, and the canyon system kept funneling us farther astray.

After reaching the top of the death slope, we hiked up an open ridge with views across a red-orange-brown-yellow sea of canyons and washes and shattered peaks. The sun sank lower, and we raced the fading day, scrambling down to a dead-end spur above yet another canyon we hadn't peered into. No bridge.

On the way back up, I realized there was really no reason anyone would ever climb this ridge. It led nowhere, as we'd just found out, and was hard to reach, as we'd already learned. It was a barren, godforsaken slice of desert, to be honest. And also sublimely beautiful, just now.

The buttery glow of sunset made the harsh terrain look inviting, almost soft.

As we reversed course, officially calling it a day, I was surprised to feel elated, not disappointed. We had failed to find the bridge, but the search had afforded a hike unlike any other. No trail to direct one's footsteps. Not even a clear destination to give shape and direction to an off-trail route. Just wandering—yes, sometimes in circles—with the tantalizing feeling that every twist and turn could reveal something extraordinary. It changed the way I looked at the terrain. And made me appreciate the true explorers who have put in countless miles hiking, sweating, and bleeding in search of the backcountry's hidden wonders.

I thought of this hike when I read about David Roberts's search for the secret hideout of the Navajo leader Hoskinini ("Catch Me if You Can," page 86). In the late 19th century, Hoskinini and his renegade band evaded the U.S. Army and established a refuge deep within some of the harshest, driest, most maze-like country in the Southwest. They remained there for years, despite efforts by the Army to find them, and no Anglo ever learned the hideout's location. Like us when we embarked on the search for that natural bridge in Death Valley, Roberts had some clues to get started, but no guarantee of success.

Did he find it? You'll have to read the story to find out. But one thing is certain: Some of the best destinations are not on any map.

#NPS100

The National Park Service turns 100 next year, and we're partnering with the National Park Foundation, the official charity of the national parks, to throw a party. The Centennial celebrations kick off this spring with the launch of the foundation's Find Your Park campaign, an interactive site designed to engage people in sharing their experiences in the country's parks through stories, photos, and videos. Learn more at FindYourPark.com. And in June, look for daily parks content on backpacker.com, as well as a special parks feature in the magazine.



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#trailchat

YOUR OPINIONS, PHOTOS, AND FEATS

Overheard

Andy "Astro" Lyon's PCT thru-hike in the face of terminal cancer ("Gone Hiking," by Casey Lyons, March 2015) made a powerful impression on readers. "The single best article to appear in BACKPACKER since I picked up my first issue in the summer of 1974," **Ted Moore** writes. "Is it too much to ask that Clint Eastwood pick up the rights to this awe-inspiring and inspirational tale of courage, decency and resolve?" **Ellen Mates** was especially moved by "the strength, care, and love [Andy's] mother and stepfather gave in supporting his choice of how to live his life."



THE REAL LESSON OF ANDY'S HIKE,
ACCORDING TO **TIFFANY REED**, IS THAT

**"LIFE IS A TERMINAL ILLNESS
AND WE HAVE NO EXCUSE TO NOT LIVE EACH MOMENT LIKE IT'S OUR LAST."**

Places **BACKPACKER** Won't Be Read This Month

The Santa Rosa, Florida, Correctional Institution, where the October 2014 issue got us banned for breaking the "admissible reading material" guidelines for inmates. The offense? Articles on DIY firestarters and surviving with a paper clip. We can't say we're sorry for giving advice that was deemed too good.



Morning glory: @walasavagephoto woke up to this view on the Berg Lake Trail in Mt. Robson Provincial Park, British Columbia.

Trending

Food For Thought

Eat better than ever on the trail with exclusive Trail Chef features on our social media channels this month.



Upgrade nutrition, taste, and convenience with expert advice, reviews of the best ready-to-eat food, and readers' picks for favorite post-hike meals. **PLUS:** Enter our reader recipe contest for a chance to win sweet new cookware.



Think you're already a Titanium Chef? Tag your camp meal photos with the hashtag #BPMag for a chance to be regrammed by @BackpackerMag.



Follow @backpackermag for daily tips and recipes from our Trail Chef.



Trail food has never looked so appetizing. See mouth-watering backcountry dishes at pinterest.com/backpackermag.



Check out weekly slide-shows of the best backcountry picnic spots, the most unconventional meal combinations, and more at backpacker.com/foodupgrade.

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YOUR OPINIONS, PHOTOS, AND FEATS

Overheard

Mark Jenkins's essay ("Go Solo," January 2015) sparked a heated debate over the risks and rewards of going it alone. "The liberation, exhilaration, and joy you feel is worth every moment," @cullman1988 writes. "You're required to make decisions without relying on the instant answer we are so accustomed to."

Other readers, however, felt that Jenkins's failure to leave an itinerary was "ignorant," "selfish," and "disappointing." Jens Pederson thinks "I Survived" would have been a more fitting title for the article. "Not only are solo hikers putting their own lives at risk," says Annette Hadaway, "they are putting the lives of search and rescue teams at risk as well."

Nathan Mesnikoff tried to find a happy medium: "I hike solo routinely, year-round—it's my preferred style—but it seems odd to be so against taking simple precautions. My life is worth more than the rush I might get out of emulating Muir or Abbey ... I don't think hiking solo is stupid or reckless, but I'm not so sure about the style you describe."



At the "ripe young age of 60," Hans Nielsen is well on his way to acing the Hiker's Life List (January 2015). He's checked off 32 of our suggestions already, including hiking the John Muir Trail (no. 45), cliff jumping (no. 48), and building a snow cave (no. 84).

Got a comment or trail photo to share? Send feedback to letters@backpacker.com.

Ursus Controversus

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service plans to reintroduce grizzlies to Washington's Cascade range, where the species has supposedly been absent for decades (our writer joined the search back in 2013: backpacker.com/ghostorgizzly). The news started a lively debate on Facebook.

PRO

"If you're brave enough to go out into the wilderness, you have to deal with every creature Earth has to offer. Even the scary ones."

—Kaitlyn Hix

"Apex predators are extremely important for environmental balance. They belong there."

—Jacob Breaux

CON

"I've had too many close encounters living in Alaska to wish them on anyone else."

—Ralph Scott



YOUR VOTES



72%



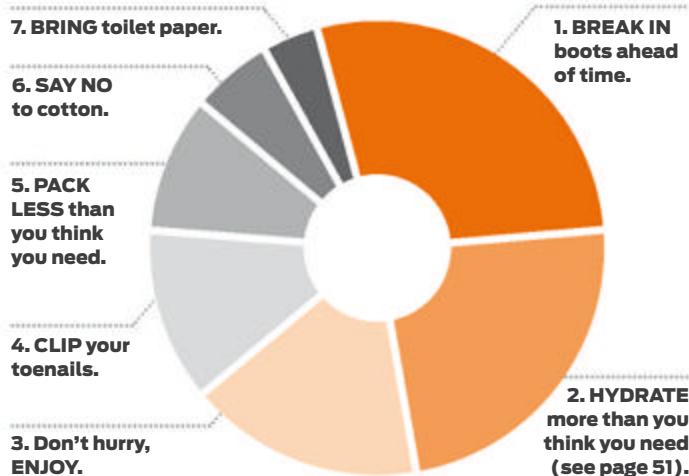
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First Night Out

This month, hundreds of first-time backpackers will hit the trail for adventures both big and local. Inevitably, mistakes will be made (see page 16), so we asked readers to weigh in with their own sage wisdom for beginners and charted the seven most common suggestions.



Black Diamond Athlete Daniel Jung on route in the Etringham Quarry, Siegen, Germany.



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014

05.2015

the play list

This month's top
trips and picks



1

**Discover flower power.
Tom McCall Preserve, OR**

Come May, Tom McCall Preserve in the Columbia River Gorge explodes with blooms. To see this display of purple lupine and yellow balsamroot, take the Rowena Crest Trail .5 mile to the 2-mile McCall Point Trail. The park boasts more than 200 plant species (including four that are totally unique to the Gorge), which bloom from late February through June, but photographer Jesse Estes says the best time to visit is during the first two weeks of May. [Info bit.do/TomMcCallPreserve](http://bit.do/TomMcCallPreserve)



THE EXPERIENCE

2

Amateur Hour: First Night of the Season

The early season wilds might be cold, but getting out there is always worth it.
BY CASEY LYONS

→IT WAS MAY. A glorious, tulip-bound May and trees in Boston were turning on their lime greens. The breeze carried just enough heat to make me forget all about the long winter. Cold leaves an imprint when you're in your early 20s and so broke you pile on blankets inside because you can't afford to turn on the heat. It was May and the robins had returned and what I needed, maybe more than heating oil, was to get outside.

I packed the gear I had, hoping it'd be enough: Moonstone synthetic 35°F bag, abused Z-Rest shorty I bought for a long section on the Appalachian Trail, Capilene long undies I'd had for a decade, a fleece vest handed down from my dad, and a rain suit, just in case. It was a summer kit—and old at that—but in my rush to meet spring, I didn't even consider that staying home

might be the right answer.

On the shadowy side of a mountain in the Berkshires, I climbed through clouds of my own breath—it was much cooler here than the city. The footing was the same jumble of roots and rocks common to the AT, and my feet were remembering how to move over them. I felt something inside me waking up, while something else let go. The views extended far over dun-colored rollers. Things were opening. My heart rate climbed with the trail, the sweat began soon enough.

Little patches of snow hiding in the shade passed under my feet, now rubbed with blisters on the heels—they'd gone soft without the discipline of hiking boots. But how could I care when I followed bear tracks that had frozen into the spring mud like plaster casts? They looked fresh enough



to keep me scanning over my shoulder. Fear, sharp and heavy, replaced the slow grind of worry. That, too, I hadn't felt in too long.

I aimed for the Hemlocks Lean-to—one of two shelters within .1 mile of each other—and found it empty this early in shoulder season. In a month, it'd be packed most every night, and in a few months, the trickle of AT northbounders would fill this shelter and spill into the woods nearby in one big, stinky party. But tonight, there was no one. I emptied my pack onto the wooden platform, unstuffed my sleeping bag, and laid it out to loft. It looked like an empty newspaper bag, but I'd spent so many summer nights sweating in the thing that I thought—hoped—it

◀ A chilly, shoulder-season morning in the desert north of Moab, Utah

would be enough.

Dusk had swept the hint of the warmth out of the day and real cold was coming. I put on my last layer with the knowledge that this was as warm as I could get, and made a fire. Its heat seeped through my raincoat, the fleece, baselayers, and right down to my skin. I poked at the coals, warm and happy with my flask of \$12 whiskey. I climbed into my sleeping bag. Thus began the coldest night of my life.

I woke a one-hour eternity later, the shelter's interior so dark I couldn't tell if my eyes were open. My ribs were seized in a shiver. I got up, did pushups and jumping jacks, and used my headlamp to scan the ground for tiny burnable bits I could use to perk up the fire. I clung to its fantasy warmth and went back to sleep.

Morning didn't come. An hour later, I shivered myself awake and repeated the process. My voice was all gruff and smoke as I talked to myself, as if talking would keep me warm. But it was action and action only that would comfort me. I wasn't worried about freezing to death, just realizing that misery cuts deepest when it's self-inflicted.

Wilderness, unlike most any other venue, reflects what we bring to it. You want it to be harsh and unwelcoming, something to be fought and beaten, fine, but that's your thing. Me? I needed it to be austere and simple, to reduce cause and effect to the smallest loop possible. *My feet hurt because they're soft. I'm scared because there are bears nearby. I'm cold because I didn't pack right.* No nuance, no questions, just beautiful, uncomplicated reality.

Before or since, I've never been happier to see the dawn. Colors came back, the chill migrated from my core back into my arms and legs and finally fingers and toes, but at least I could now get moving. Besides, something beyond the sun had dawned on me. I knew, just as robins were singing in the branches, that I'd gotten a jump on the season, and that this was just the beginning.

No. 3 Get Seussian.



→ Wander amid these tent rocks on the 1.2-mile Cave Loop Trail in New Mexico's Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks

National Monument this month. Daytime temps in the 70s? Yes, please. Info bit.do/TentRocksBLM

No. 4

**Start the PCT.
Or just pray for those who do.**

About 700 people set out to thru-hike the Pacific Crest Trail each year, and we predict that to double this year, thanks to Reese-mania. Let's pray for the surge of novice hikers. We asked Reverend Patrick Donoghue, also known as Hotshot (PCT '12), to put in a good word, too.

Dear Lord, I ask that the hikers find relief from sore feet,

aching muscles, painful joints, discomfort in the shoulders from wearing lead-like backpacks, and from chafing in certain parts of the body that might not be in good taste to state in a printed prayer.

I pray that their unquenchable thirst and insatiable hunger will be satisfied in a timely manner.

With your help and the help of

my fellow hikers, I ask that any lingering doubts of their ability to complete their hike will be dispelled for good.

Amen.



IN THE CLUB

5

...in which we honor the best hiking clubs in the country.

→ In the March issue, we lauded the 213 Hikers, a Los Angeles hiking club. Then we got an earful from all the "better" clubs across the country, including the 95-year-old Cleveland Hiking Club (clevelandhikingclub.org). Key stats: 1,000+ members. 12 member-led hikes per day. 2+ weeklong trips

each year.

Think your trail club deserves a nod? Write to intheclub@backpacker.com to tell us why.



No. 6

Hike to rock art.
Volcanic Tableland, CA

"The eastern Sierra is an outdoor lover's paradise," photographer Josh Miller says. And in the Volcanic Tableland, you can add rock art viewing to the normal list of hiking, climbing, and mountain biking. Seated

at the foot of Thirteeners Basin Mountain and Mt. Tom, the BLM area is easy to access off CA 395 north of Bishop. Paiute-Shoshone rock art, some more than 8,000 years old, litters the area, so follow any number of unnamed climbers' trails. Bonus: free camping. Info bit.do/BishopBLM





7

**Be a beach bum,
Point Reyes National
Seashore, CA**

There are only two waterfalls in the Lower 48 that flow into the ocean (also known as "tidefalls"), and photographer Peter Park snapped this image atop one of them. To nab his perspective over 40-foot-tall Alamere Falls, head out from the Palomarin trailhead on a 13.2-mile out-and-back; reach Wildcat Camp (overnight option) at mile 5.6, then continue a mile south to the falls. Info.nps.gov/pore

DONE IN A DAY

8

Thrilling Scrambles

Mastered walking? Time to use your hands as well as your feet on these adventurous day trips. BY DREW ALLRED

Lady Mountain,
Zion National Park
UTAH

→ Extreme exposure and nearly 2,700 feet of elevation gain earn Lady Mountain a spot on our list. You'll need to navigate up three separate two-story-tall faces on preexisting anchors (up to 5.6 difficulty) in the first mile on this 4-mile out-and-back to the top of one of Zion Canyon's grandest towers. To get there, take the Middle Emerald Pools Trail .3 mile to the "Rockfalls"

information sign; turn west and ascend the mountain slope on an unmarked path to the first climbing section. Recommended gear Climbing gear, including 120 feet of rope Contact nps.gov/zion

Rock Rooms on Elk Mountain, Wichita Mountains Wilderness
OKLAHOMA

No, the mile-long scramble that gains 1,000 feet isn't why this hike makes the list. Nor is it the 30-foot-tall, elevator-shaft entry into the belly of the Wichita Mountains. Rather, it's

the underground maze over and under boulders through the cave-like Rock Rooms. (You don't need rope or technical skills for this trip.) Begin this 3-mile loop on the Elk Mountain Trail as you navigate 1.1 miles over scree to the moutaintop. Find the near-vertical entry into the Rock Rooms on the west side of the summit, and

then use ledges to maneuver down the narrow, boulder-clogged chute. At the bottom, follow the openings through the various Rock Rooms. Crawl through the final tunnel to reach daylight and Charon's Garden Trail, which loops 1.5 miles back to the trailhead. Recommended gear Headlamp and helmet Contact bit.do/WichitaWild



Also on our list
Big Bluff, Buffalo National River, Arkansas:
This catwalk across a 600-foot-tall bluff earns you killer views of the Ozarks, which turn brilliant emerald come April. Get there on a 3.2-mile (one-way) trip from the Center Point trailhead in the Ponca Wilderness; near mile 2.7, turn onto the Goat Trail. Recommended gear Sticky shoes Contact nps.gov/buff

The Labyrinth,
Mohonk Preserve
NEW YORK

Check off the best scramble in the Tri-State area on this 9-mile out-and-back. Less of a "trail" than a rocky jungle-gym, this route will force you to squeeze, duck, crawl, and climb class

3 across the Labyrinth. Do it the cheaper way (\$12, compared to \$26) by starting at Undercliff Road. Near mile 2.5, take Old Minnewaska Carriage Road 1.5 miles to the Mountain House property. From here, it's a .5-mile scramble on the topsy-turvy Labyrinth. Use fixed ladders in spots and, ultimately, exit via a .1-mile-long shimmy

through the Lemon Squeeze. Atop 1,617-foot Skylight Mountain, take in views of the Hudson Valley before taking Sky Top Road back to the Mountain House. Note: This one is popular; we recommend visiting in the early morning on a weekday to secure some solitude. Recommended gear Sticky shoes Contact mohonk-preserve.org

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9

LIFE LIST

Scotch Not Included

Wander the famed Scottish Highlands by day and enjoy refined, trailside B&Bs by night on this long path in the British Isles.

BY DOUGALD MACDONALD

L

Like many descendants of Scottish immigrants to America, I've traveled across the Atlantic for a glimpse of my forebears' bloody past. But, unlike most, I'm also planning a long hike to experience Great Britain's mythic mountain scenery. However, the start of my June trek feels anti-heroic, as I step out of the train with suitcases in hand.

On the 96-mile West Highland Way, trail-side B&Bs and hostels allow hikers to forgo soggy, midge-infested tents, while an optional luggage service ferries your bags to the following night's destination. Hence, my wife and I carry only daypacks loaded with foul-

weather gear and tins of buttery McVitie's biscuits when we head out from Bridge of Orchy to tackle the route's last and best 36 miles on a three-day hike through the Grampian Mountains.

On our first day we cross Rannoch Moor, a 50-square-mile, mostly treeless expanse of pillow heather and shallow lochans (ponds) fully exposed to storms off the North Atlantic, 30 miles to the west. Heavy, black-bottomed clouds rip over the nearby peaks, and some of the nearby 3,000'ers—known as Munros—still hold traces of snow. Signs warn hikers not to leave the path, lest they vanish into a peat bog.

After 12 miles, we stop for the night at Kings House, a whitewashed inn dating to the 17th

century, and settle in the Climber's Bar for fresh salmon and neeps and tatties (turnips and potatoes). My wife samples haggis, and I sip whiskey distilled in a neighboring valley.

In the morning, we climb the Devil's Staircase, a switchbacking path to the 1,800-foot high point of the West Highland Way, a rocky saddle between two bald mountains. (This route threads between the Highlands' peaks, not over them, though many hikers conclude their trek by summiting 4,409-foot Ben Nevis.) Cliff-bound Glen Coe, a narrow valley, lies in shadows far below—it's easy to imagine clans massing for battle to a bagpiper's mournful call. Here, in the winter of 1692, Campbells murdered 38 of their MacDonald hosts—my ancestors.



Score this view of the Grampians near mile 71 on the West Highland Way (or mile 9 of the writer's route).

Fortunately, the Highlands keep reminding us of their softer side: Lilac-colored rhododendrons line the trail, the unmistakable call of a cuckoo bursts from a thicket, and even the spiny thistle—emblem of the Scottish nation—brightens the fields with its lovely pink blossoms.

We spend our second night in Kinlochleven, a small mountain village where we discover fishing vessels moored at the head of a spindly loch leading to the sea.

Blue skies stretch overhead in the morning as we cross an open valley with views over fjord-like Loch Leven. In a pine forest we find a waist-high cairn that marks another massacre, this time with my clansmen slaughtering Campbells. More than three centuries later,

tradition holds that passing MacDonalds should add a stone, while Campbells take one away. After heaving a big rock onto the cairn, I leave behind thoughts of barbarous feuds and continue toward the looming bulk of Ben Nevis.

DO IT Plan seven days for the 96-mile thru-hike or three for the author's 36-mile section. Public transportation provides access to midway trailheads. **Season** April to October; May and June often bring good weather and fewer bugs; pink heather blooms from late August into September. **Info** Find guidebook, map, accommodation, luggage-transfer, and other trip-planning essentials at west-highland-way.co.uk.

No. 10 See Seattle three ways.

→ There are too many fun things happening in Seattle this month to pick just one.

May 3

Bike-n-Brew

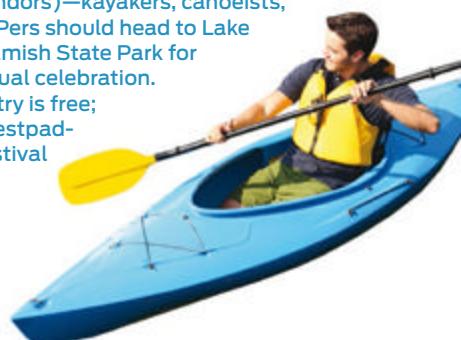
Exercise and beer go together like rain and Gore-Tex. Start your month off right on the annual Bike-n-Brew, a 40-mile ride that connects Schooner Exact Brewery and Airways Brewing Company via city bike paths. **Info** Register online (\$45) at bit.do/Bike-N-Brew.

May 8 to 9

Northwest Paddling Festival

Paddling might even be more PNW than bikes and beer. No matter what you want to spend—energy (races), brain power (instructional classes), or money (60 gear vendors)—kayakers, canoeists, and SUPers should head to Lake Sammamish State Park for the annual celebration.

Info Entry is free; northwestpaddlingfestival.com

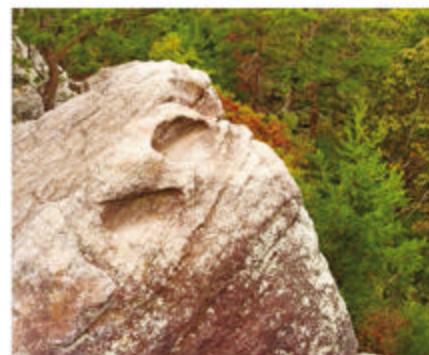


May 15 to 17

Rainier Independent Film Festival

Check out the latest indie flicks inside a yurt that overlooks Rainier. Film list should be released by early April. **Info** \$5-\$35, depending on perks; rainier-filmfest.com

No. 11 Take a sacred seat.



→ Set up like a Cherokee chieftain on Georgia's 1,946-foot Sawnee summit (via the 4-mile Indian Seats Trail), where centuries ago Cherokees carved seat-like depressions in the granite. **Info** bit.do/IndianSeatsTrail

024
play list

12

Play hide-and-seek.
Grand Staircase-Escalante
National Monument, UT

Hoodoos, slots, and arches make Devil's Garden a good place to get lost. Here, photographer Kennan Harvey and his nine-year-old daughter, Roan, linked the unnamed footpaths south of the parking area to see the Four Wise Men (a collection of troll-like hoodoos), Mano Arch, and, pictured, 16-foot-wide Metate Arch. Devil's Garden is only 640 acres, but Harvey says you could spend hours in just this spot. And that's not lost time. Info ut.blm.gov/monument





The quietest national park

Great Basin, Nevada



Cruise past Stella Lake in Wheeler Peak's shadow on our expert's favorite dayhike.

The insider

Great Basin's Superintendent since 2013, Steven Mietz, has hiked all 14 of Great Basin's "known" routes. "Every time I look at our map," he says, "my mind wanders, and I dream of all the unknown, untracked territory to hike."

The perfect day

With just 121 square miles (compared to Yosemite's 1,190), "Great Basin still has all the terrain of the bigger parks—but it's more intimate," Mietz says. Case in point: You can see

5,000-year-old bristlecone pines, the state's only glacier, and alpine lakes on a single, 7.3-mile lasso-loop dayhike by linking the Bristlecone, Glacier, and Alpine Lakes Loop Trails. "Most people will turn around before the Glacier Trail, so you'll have it to yourself," Mietz says.

Best backcountry campsite

It's hard to say which is the main selling point of this primo spot: the turquoise waters of Johnson Lake, the green meadow beside it, or the yellow wildflowers that pop up in

May. Set aside two days and a night to hit this alpine paradise on a 13.1-mile loop on the Baker Lake and Johnson Lake Trails. (There is a short off-trail piece between the two lakes to cross a scree pass.)

Get off the beaten path

Crowded doesn't happen here, but there's still more people around the park's northern third (home to the car campground, visitor center, and scenic drive). Ditch it in favor of Highland Ridge, a skinny, north-south spine that connects

13,065-foot Wheeler Peak (one of only two Thirteeners in the state), 12,306-foot Baker Peak, and 11,657-foot Mt. Washington on a monster, 9.8-mile (one-way) dayhike. "This corridor is underexplored—and almost all of it is unmarked," Mietz says. Reach Wheeler via the Wheeler Peak Summit Trail, then follow the ridge off-trail to the south. Leave a shuttle car in the Mt. Washington parking lot.

Season

May to October

Permits None

Info nps.gov/grba

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No. 14**Have a drink on Mt. Hood.**

→ Hiking permits required beginning May 15.

No. 15**...Or have a drink on Mt. Hood.**

→ It's less adventuresome than the other option, but no one can call you a liar. This hand-blown pint glass has Hood (proportionally 3D from USGS data) inlaid at the bottom (\$38; north-drinkware.com).

**No. 16**

We're throwing a 2,180-mile party from Georgia to Maine. Join our record-setting attempt to hike the Appalachian Trail in a day. Learn more at backpacker.com/ATinADay.

No. 17**Hear the chirp.**

→ The upside of the Cascades' record-low snowpack this winter? Pika season is upon us! Head into the alpine zones earlier than ever this spring to catch a glimpse of these doughy-eyed cuties.



WEEKENDS

18

1 of 3



Blackjack, which nestles in a pine forest, home to bald eagles and red-cockaded woodpeckers. The first-come, first-serve shelter sleeps four and has a water pump. If taken, camp on the flat ground nearby.

**Gator country**

Scan for American alligators lounging under boardwalks; they're most active in spring and fall. (For more viewing tips, visit backpacker.com/alligator.) This area is also home to equally carnivorous (but slightly less alarming) Venus fly-traps, pitcher plants, and sundew, which thrive in sandy soil by the swamps.

DO IT Shuttle car 34.760653, -76.761582; 7 miles east of Newport off FS 181. (Commercial option: Contact the Carteret County Wildlife Club via carteretcounty-wildlifeclub.org.)

Trailhead 34.938877, -76.822006; 16 miles north of the shuttle car on Pine Cliff Rd.

Season October to May; late spring for the best chances of seeing wildlife and carnivorous plants

Permits None **Custom-centered map** bit.do/BPmapNeusikTrl (\$15) **Contact** bit.do/CroatanNF **Trip data** backpacker.com/NeusikTrl

Trip stats**Distance:****22 miles****Time:****3 days****Difficulty:**

Wet, wild, and totally secluded

Croatan National Forest, North Carolina

My feet are screaming inside my boots. I had expected this flat 22-miler near the Outer Banks to be an easy beach walk—but I've been walking through standing water for three straight hours. Now, I'm staring at what seems like the tenth water hazard of the day in this cypress-lined swamp where alligators lurk. Yet, I'm still smiling. It's wild out here. Quiet out here. And I'm about to rest my feet at a campsite hidden amid the longleaf pines, beside a dark pool shrouded in mist—and the best kind of loneliness. BY STUART PECK



Turn-by-turn
From Pine Cliff Picnic Area

- ① Follow the Neusik Trail (part of the 672-mile Mountains-to-Sea Trail) 1.7 miles along Neusik Creek.
- ② Cutting inland on the trail, hike south to an unnamed pool at mile 13.2.
- ③ Continue .4 mile southeast to FS 147/169; follow it 2 miles south.
- ④ At mile 15.6, veer southeast (hiker's left) onto the Neusik Trail and follow it 4.4 miles to the Blackjack Lodge shelter.
- ⑤ Go .8 mile on the main path to Mill Creek Road; cross it and parallel NC 181 to mile 22 where your shuttle car awaits.



Campsite 1
Unnamed pool (mile 13.2)

Inside a stand of toothpick-thin pines, find this secluded site just west of the trail. It's marked by a user-made fire pit and can fit three tents (first-come, first-serve). The tannin-colored lake (drinkable if filtered) attracts white-tailed deer and otters.



Campsite 2
Blackjack Lodge (mile 20)

You'll pass a trio of these three-sided, lean-to shelters on this section of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, but we recommend staying at



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No. 19

Climb Bald Mountain.

→Nevada harbors some 18 mountains named Bald, but we think this one deserves your attention this spring. Hike to the 9,544-footer in newly designated Wovoka Wilderness in Lyon County. The area protects 48,000 acres of canyons and piñon-juniper woods surrounding the peak. In May, expect yellow wildflowers. **Info** bit.do/WovokaWild

Space out.



20 **Saturn will be at its closest approach to Earth on Saturday, May 22. Head out into the dark wild to see it (with the naked eye); ID its moons and rings with a medium-sized (5 to 8 inches) telescope.**

WEEKENDS

21

2 of 3

Land Before Time

Petrified Forest
National Park, Arizona



A hiker explores Painted Desert just east of Lithodendron Wash.

Trip stats

Distance:

11.5 miles

Time:

2 days

Difficulty:



→At one point, giant reptiles roamed a towering forest of tropical conifers here. And while the dinosaurs are long gone, the trees are still here as shards of petrified wood littering the desert. Wandering through the trailless backcountry of Petrified Forest National Park, I feel like I'm the first human to ever set foot here. But I won't be the last. **BY SHELBY CARPENTER**



Turn-by-turn
From the Painted Desert Inn

- 1 Pick up the **Wilderness Area Access Trail** and follow cairns until you hit Lithodendron Wash near mile 1.
- 2 Leave the trail and follow the wash (hiker's right) to explore the Painted Desert. The writer headed north-west to the sandy

mesa  at roughly 35.138744, -109.833885 near mile 6. Get her exact turn-by-turn directions at the link in "Trip Data" at right.

- 3 Navigate back to Lithodendron Wash and retrace your steps to the trailhead.



Campsite
Plateau (mile 6)

Get the full
Painted Desert

experience when you overnight on this mesa. There are no established backcountry campsites in this park, so find a flat spot and savor 360-degree views, which include Chinde Mesa to the north and Pilot Rock to the west. Make sure to guy out your tent.



Highlight

Be sure to check out Onyx Bridge, a 30-foot-long petrified tree, around 35.108566, -109.792206. If you follow the writer's exact route, you'll pass it between Lithodendron Wash and the

campsite (near mile 2.1).



Petroglyphs

After your overnight, tack on an easy (just .3 mile) loop on the Puerco Pueblo Trail to see the largest-known archaeological site within the park.



Visit the expansion

The National Park Service added 15,000 acres of multicolored canyonlands to Petrified Forest last April. See the new stuff—200-million-year-old clam beds, hoodoos, and petroglyphs—in Red Basin on a 6-mile lasso loop.

Park on Blue Mesa Loop Road (just before the split) and hike east. Get more beta at bit.do/RedBasinHike.

DO IT Trailhead

35.084023, -109.789116; 28 miles east of Holbrook off Park Rd. **Season** March through May and October through November **Permits** Obtain a free backcountry permit from the Painted Desert Visitor Center.

Water Pack in all you'll need; we recommend a gallon per person per day. **Custom-centered map** bit.do/BPmap-LithoWash (\$15) **Contact** nps.gov/pefo **Trip data** backpacker.com/LithoWash

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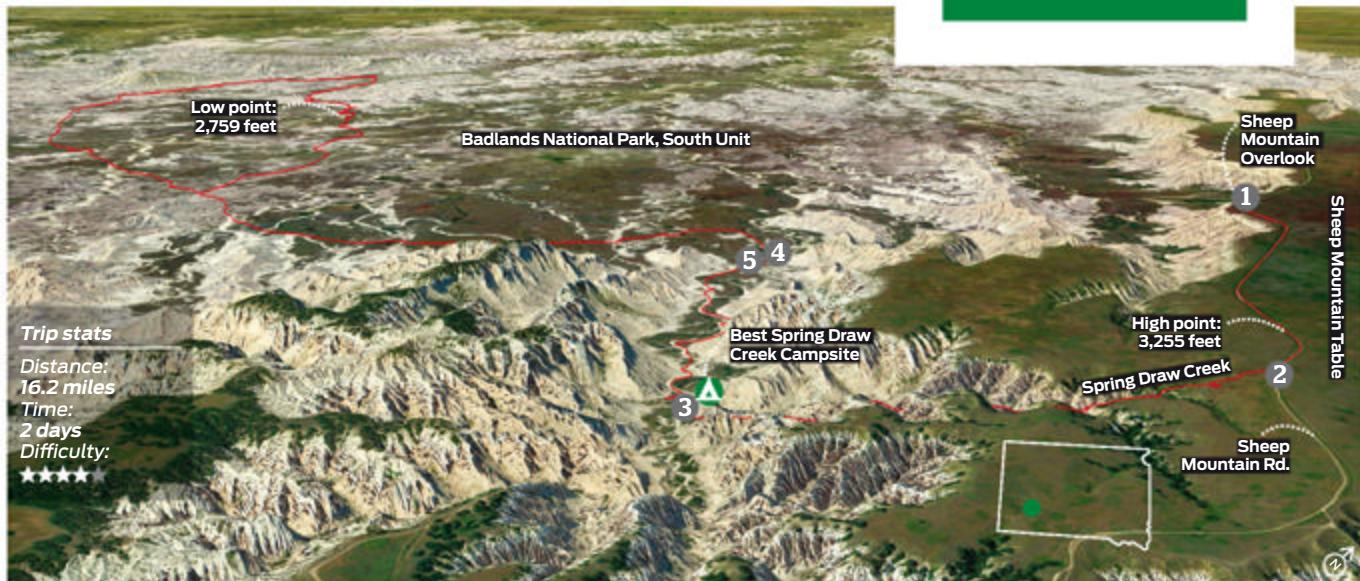
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Choose your own adventure

Badlands National Park, South Dakota



I tilt my shoulders to squeeze through the slots in Spring Draw Creek. The narrow corridor winds through crumbly, chalk-gray badlands for a few miles before widening to unveil a wide-open grassland, home to pronghorn and mule deer. With no tourists, this feels like a forgotten prairie wilderness, not a national park. Badlands receives more than a million visitors annually, but I'm in its lonely South Unit, which, despite encompassing more than half of the park's area, accounts for just one percent of visitors. I pull up on a grassy knoll that overlooks a prairie dappled with yellow and purple flowers. There are no trails here, so I happily blaze my own. BY KEN ILGUNAS



Turn-by-turn From the Sheep Mountain Overlook

① Walk 1.1 miles south on Sheep Mountain Rd. to Spring Draw Creek. The rocky wash is hard to ID, but it's near mile

marker 6 on the west side of the road.

② Turn west (hiker's right) into Spring Draw Creek, and follow the drainage through a slot canyon. Be aware of a few steep drops, and make use of preexisting aids to descend.

③ At mile 2, make a basecamp and continue dayhiking along Spring Draw Creek; reach the grassland near mile 2.5.

④ From here, create your own lasso loop. The writer continued west out of the canyon and then

looped 11 miles counterclockwise back to the canyon; to follow his exact route, get beta at the "Trip data" link at right. ⑤ From the grassland, retrace your steps through the drainage to your basecamp and back to the car.



Campsite Plateau in Spring Draw Creek (mile 2)

Find this elevated patch of soft grass (big enough for a few tents) next to a couple of spruce trees above the creek

near mile 2. The creek passes nearby, but it's unreliable; we recommend packing in your water (a gallon per person per day). There are no designated campsites; campfires are prohibited.



Weather

Be sure to check the forecast before you head out. Spring Draw Creek's meager trickle can turn into a tent-drowning flood with enough rain. Also, the dirt becomes about

as slick as a skating rink—what the rangers call "Badlands gumbo."

DO IT

Trailhead 43.692720, -102.579015; 9 miles south of Scenic on Sheep Mountain Rd.

Season April

through October.

The badlands

can be muddy

through spring,

but should be

dried out by June.

Permits None

Custom-centered map bit.do/BPmapSouthUnit (\$15) **Contact** nps.gov/badl **Trip data** backpacker.com/SouthUnit

No. 23 Find a salamander.

→ Or, really geek out and find 30. In April and May, the Smokies—nicknamed "the Salamander Capital of the World"—host 30 different species. Find a checklist at SmokiesAmphibians and head out

on the 3-mile Trillium Gap Trail to Grotto Falls, where the amphibians hang. Bonus points if you locate a Hellbender, a species that can grow to 29 inches long. Info nps.gov/grsm





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skills

Stay Dry

Yes, spring weather can be wet. No, you shouldn't stay indoors. Hit the trail with tips from Matt Schonwald, a rainy-day pro at Washington's Back Country Adventure Guides.

1) Line your pack. "I use a heavy-duty compactor bag to keep my gear dry, rather than a bunch of fancy stuffsacks," Schonwald says. "It's lighter and cheaper."

2) Wear a skirt. Actually, it's called a WeatherWrap (\$142; rainskirts.com), but let's be honest, it's a waterproof skirt and there's no reason to be ashamed. "Just having a layer that protects your thighs and crotch is really useful." (Use rainpants for extended wet weather.) **3)** Pack an extra tarp and string it up over your tent. Even the best tents get soggy in the worst weather. **4)** Carry an umbrella. They're easy to pack, improve visibility and hearing (compared to a hood), and provide a dry refuge for eating a snack or shooting photos. **5)** Walk, don't run. Simply put, the harder you run to avoid the rain, the wetter you're likely to get. **6)** If you need grip more than warmth, wear gardening gloves. "They have a rubberized palm," Schonwald says, "so unlike leather-palmed gloves, they stay grippy when wet. I use gloves made with a quick-drying polyester knit." Schonwald's picks: Atlas 300 Non Thermal or, for colder conditions, 451 Gray Winter Therma Fit (check a gardening store). **7)** Keep layers dry. Bring extra socks and gloves, and then dry out damp ones in your sleeping bag at night. **8)** Bring a bivy sack. "If things get really wet, I use my bivy to add insulation to a lighter summer bag and prevent tent walls and other wet gear from soaking my bag." **9)** Waterproof your boots. Apply a conditioner like Nikwax Nubuck & Suede (nikwax-usa.com).



Use a ball cap to stiffen your hood's brim, like this hiker in Washington's Hoh Rainforest.

cheat sheet

Navigate Like a Pro

Liz Thomas has backpacked more than 15,000 miles, and she holds the women's unsupported speed record on the Appalachian Trail (80 days). Here's how she stays on track.

KEEP YOUR MIND AND BODY SHARP.

1 It's really hard to navigate if you're hungry, thirsty, or cold. "An unfueled brain is more likely to make poor decisions," Thomas says.

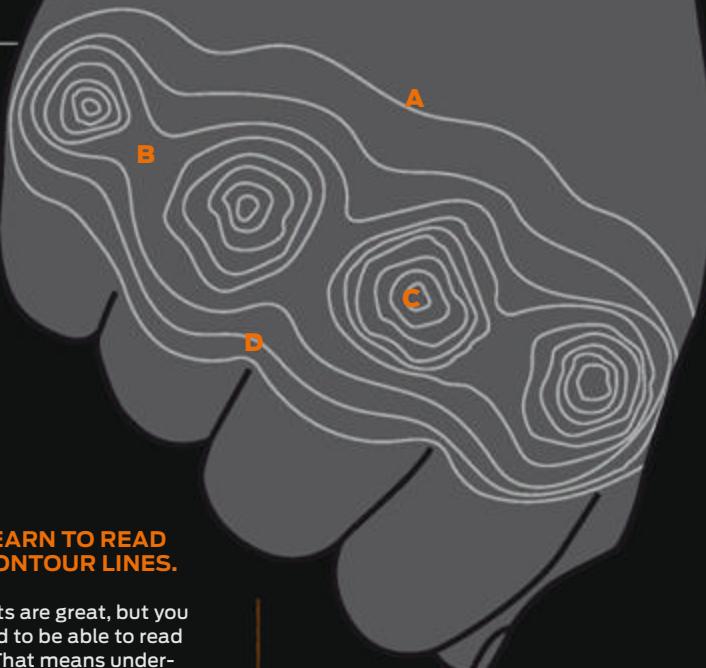
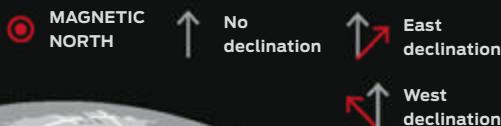
**2**

CONFIRM YOUR LOCATION ON YOUR MAP OFTEN.

Sounds obvious, but this is the single best way to prevent wandering off course. "I hike with a map in my hand, pocket, or—a little embarrassingly—stuffed in my bra," Thomas says.

4 LEARN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUE NORTH AND MAGNETIC NORTH.

A compass needle points to magnetic north. That's not the same as true north (the North Pole, or the direction of the North Star). The difference between true north and magnetic north is called declination; it changes over time (as the Earth's magnetic field shifts), and it varies according to your location (see below). Learn how to account for it at backpacker.com/declination.



3 LEARN TO READ CONTOUR LINES.

GPS units are great, but you still need to be able to read a map. That means understanding how contour lines represent real-world terrain. Get started: Make a fist into "Knuckle Mountains." Draw a circle around each peak, or knuckle, keeping your pen at the same "elevation" as you draw each line. Draw concentric circles on each knuckle, connecting points that are the same height. Flatten your hand: The lines represent different "elevations" on the topographic map of your fist.

- A.** Contour line. The closer the lines, the steeper the terrain. Check your map for the contour interval (the elevation change between lines).
- B.** Saddle, indicated by opposing U's.
- C.** Peak
- D.** Drainage or valley, with the U's (or V's) pointing the same direction, uphill. Ridges look similar, with the V's pointing the same direction, but they face downhill.

THINK LIKE A RAILROAD BUILDER.

5 Traveling cross-country? Observe the landscape and imagine, "If I were a railroad engineer, where would I build the line?" You will likely choose the path of least resistance.

6 USE NATURE'S BUMPER LANES.

Ridges, rivers, and prominent peaks can all serve as route boundaries. Pay attention to the terrain that borders your route, and use landmarks to avoid going astray.

7 AVOID SHORTCUTS.

Not only does cutting switchbacks or taking shortcuts cause erosion, but it's also an easy way to get lost.

ENTER THE RIGHT DATUM IN YOUR GPS.

8 Technology is great—if you use it correctly. The most common GPS error: failing to match datums (the systems used to match features on the ground to coordinates on the map). For example, a WGS 84 coordinate taken from Google Earth and entered into a GPS set to NAD 27 can be up to a quarter mile off.

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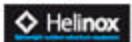
EVENT INFORMATION

3/24/2015	REI (BOISE, ID) 7:00 PM
3/25/2015	AL'S SPORTING GOODS (LOGAN, UT) 6:30 PM
3/26/2015	REI (SALT LAKE CITY, UT) 7:00 PM
4/2/2015	MOOSEJAW MOUNTAINEERING (BOULDER, CO) 6:30 PM
4/7/2015	LEWIS AND CLARK (SPRINGDALE, AR) 6:30 PM
4/9/2015	REI (CASTLETON, IN) 6:30 PM
4/14/2015	BENCHMARK OUTDOOR OUTFITTERS (BLUE ASH, OH) 6:30 PM
4/15/2015	CUMBERLAND TRANSIT (NASHVILLE, TN) 6:00 PM
4/21/2015	REI (ATLANTA) 6:30 PM
4/22/2015	ROCK/CREEK (CHATTANOOGA, TN) 7:00 PM
4/23/2015	MAST GENERAL STORE (KNOXVILLE, TN) 6:00 PM
4/28/2015	MAST GENERAL STORE (ASHEVILLE, NC) 6:00 PM
4/29/2015	GREAT OUTDOOR PROVISION (CHARLOTTE, NC) 7:00 PM
5/5/2015	GREAT OUTDOOR PROVISION (WINSTON-SALEM, NC) 6:30 PM
5/6/2015	FOOTSLOGGERS (BOONE, NC) 6:30 PM
5/15-5/17	TRAIL DAYS (DAMASCUS, VA)
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THE CHALLENGE

Sew Your Own Ultralight Pack

Can a needle newbie sew a DIY backpack that promises to save weight and money? By Ted Alvarez

TO LOVE THE OUTDOORS is to love gear—and to critique it mercilessly. “Who put these too-long straps here?” “I don’t need *this* pocket.” “It costs how much?” “Ugh, the color.” Equipped with trail-earned insight and ignorant of market forces, it’s easy to start thinking you could do better. But could you really?

It’s not unprecedented: Osprey founder Mike Pfotenhauer sewed his first homemade pack at age 16. He and other legendary garage designers-turned-industry titans, like Dick Kelty and Wayne Gregory, gave me hope. So I resolved to make the Tedware HotPax 3000: a DIY ultralight, artisanal backpack

handmade in Seattle by yours truly. I’d start with a custom run of one single pack, maybe expand when Osprey called. And I’d pull it off despite being the kid who ate macaroni necklaces before he could finish them. I’ve never sewn a stitch in my life. Details.

Step one: Rip a design off the internet. Ultralight king Ray Jardine has sold \$70 Ray-Way pack kits for years, but that felt like cheating. Plus, I wanted a custom job that could turn heads at an ultralighters’ convention (bonus: stripped-down packs are easier to make). So I waded through a sea of blueprints and settled on a streamlined model with a 3,000-cubic-inch

(50-liter) body compartment to swallow up to a week’s worth of gear, two elastic hip pockets, two mesh external pockets, a few gear loops, and no hipbelt (Tedware’s design ethic: less is more). I chose second-in-class silnylon over the suggested mithril-like Cuben Fiber for my body material: I figured if the prototype HotPax 3000 ended up a pile of shredded threads on the floor, it didn’t need to be an unnecessarily expensive pile. Total cost of raw materials: \$56.

Step two: Learn to sew. I contacted a friend at the famed Rainy Pass Repair to show me the ropes. “You’ll soon learn that the only reason to make your own gear is because you like making your own gear,” she said. For an aspiring gear designer, this was only slightly less encouraging than my first attempt at sewing, which temporarily broke the machine. “Maybe I’ll start,” she said, handing me chalk and scissors to cut out necessary sections of material for later stitching. The outline of my pack straps showed my straight lines had not improved much since kindergarten.

She took the lead on sewing

while I handled prep and assembly, then I tried my hand again on the machine. I was nervous: Her stitches were assured and sturdy; mine looked overcaffeinated. Six hours later, I emerged with a flat square of silnylon with pack straps and pockets attached. A decent start, but my sewing sensei had her limits, and I’d have to complete the pack alone. Scariest of all, I’d somehow need to origami a flat piece of fabric into a pack shape.

With a borrowed machine, I painstakingly tried to close the gap between my aspirations and ability. Threads and eyes got crossed; I wore out all the swear words. But over the hours, small miracles accumulated. I connected pack straps; I threaded elastic draw loops. When directions got murky, I modeled my moves after store-bought packs around the house. Crafting witches disguised as Midwestern housewives on YouTube solved the particularly vexing mystery of the rectangular pack bottom. Six more hours, and I was looking at a thing of mongrel beauty: the first Tedware HotPax 3000, weighing in at a gossamer 7.5 ounces. And of course it comes

in next year's trending colors, kelly green and black.

But I really became a proud pack papa when the HotPax 3000 bore a 20-pound load in the Cascade foothills. The lack of hipbelt or framesheet worried me, but it contoured to my back like a turtle shell when filled with tent, layers, sleeping bag and pad, food, and water. A rare sunny spring day in the Northwest meant huffing past hordes on the ups and dodging children and dogs on the downs. Throughout, my homemade pack clung to my back—solid, steady, and effective. Perhaps not as sturdy as some off-the-shelf ultralight packs I've used but certainly lighter and cheaper. I swelled with pride and confidence at having made this pack with these two clumsy hands. I resisted the urge to point it out to strangers, but I did take it on and off with a flourish hoping someone would ask.

Is it perfect? Hell, no. The straps are a notch too wide for my shoulders, and the silnylon is

slippery; they require maximum cinching to stay put. Lakes of sweat pool on my back. Haters might call it a glorified stuff-sack. I have durability concerns over the long run (only partially because I poked a scissor hole in it during assembly). Features are almost nonexistent; I already want to add a sternum strap and one internal pocket. But these are all issues I hope to resolve in next season's Tedware HotPax 3001.

Call me, Osprey.

THE VERDICT

PASS

My result is a functional pack, thanks to a little (okay, a lot of) help from my friend. But with practice, good plans, sewing experience, and a passion for DIY projects, I'm confident anyone can build an ultralight pack he can be proud of. Minimal sewing experience is okay if paired with maximum passion.

7 TIPS FOR BEGINNING SEWERS

1. Technical fabrics are available from specialty suppliers (like ripstopbytheroll.com). Try inexpensive materials before shelling out for the pricier stuff. Buy 25 percent more yardage than you think you need. You'll make mistakes.

2. Good blueprints go a long way. Unless you are an exceptional draftsman, designing from scratch is extremely difficult. But the web is littered with great custom designs. Mix and match features to create your custom pack. (We used a modified version of this: bit.do/DIYpack).

3. Ask for help. If you know someone with sewing experience, a few beers or a dinner are a small price to pay to avoid hours of frustration.

4. If you suspect you're making a mistake, you are; stop and correct it immediately. A sewing machine lacks an undo feature, and even minor flaws can ruin the pack's structural integrity.

5. Use a ruler. Measure everything meticulously, and use chalk to mark fabric for cuts and stitches. Err on extra for seam allowances: Overlapping fabric offers leeway and strength; undercut fabric will require a do-over. Tip: Measure twice, cut once.

6. Go for minimal stitching. More stitches mean more holes and more places to weaken the fabric. Cut and sew 2-square-inch reinforcement patches to stress points where shoulder straps, webbing, hipbelts, and load-bearing loops attach.

7. Practice on excess material to get a feel for how the fabric works with your particular sewing machine.



It's always hard to leave paradise. Packing up camp on a sunny morning in Coyote Gulch, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, UT - Andrew Burd

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Make a super meal with just kale, quinoa, and walnuts.

Simply Delicious

You already know packing more stuff isn't always better. These tasty, three-ingredient recipes apply that same philosophy to your menu.

By Jennifer Bowen

Superfood Bowl GF V

These ingredients are all nutrition powerhouses, with antioxidants, healthy fats, and complete proteins.

- 1/2 cup** quinoa (pre-rinsed and dried at home; or use pre-cooked, though this adds weight)
- 2 oz.** kale (bag with a lightly moistened paper towel; it will keep 3 to 4 days, or use kale chips for hot temps or longer trips)
- 2 Tbsp** toasted walnuts (Toast your own: 5 to

10 minutes on a baking sheet in a 350°F oven.)

Boil 1/2 cup water with quinoa, then reduce heat. Cover and simmer about 15 minutes, until water is absorbed and quinoa is tender. Let stand 5 minutes. Add salt, pepper, and about 2-3 Tbsp olive oil or butter. Shred kale, stir in (it'll wilt from the heat), and top with walnuts.

BREAKFAST OPTION → Sub in a handful of raisins, chopped dates, or chopped apples for the kale.

InstaPizza

Make a personal pie—or three—for dinner, or as an appetizer for a crowd.

- 1 fajita-size tortilla**
- 1-3 Tbsp pizza sauce**
(pack in a small plastic container; less means crisper crust)
- 1/4 cup Italian blend pre-shredded cheese**

Spread the sauce over the tortilla and place in a lightly oiled, non-stick skillet over med-low heat. Sprinkle with cheese and cover. Cook until cheese is melted and tortilla is crisped on bottom, about 90 seconds.

Lemony Salmon Noodles

This is an easy-but-upgraded version of everyone's favorite tuna noodle casserole.

- 2 oz. chunk smoked salmon**
- 3 oz. wide egg noodles**
(the wider, the better)
- 1/2 lemon**

Bring 2 cups of salted water to a boil in a medium pot, add noodles, and reduce heat to simmer, partially covering pot. When noodles are tender (about 7 minutes), drain completely and stir in 1-2 Tbsp oil or butter. Flake salmon into noodles (bigger flakes are better). Squeeze lemon over noodles just before eating.

Strawberry Almond Cake

This easy dessert is perfect for a backcountry birthday. Sub in dried cherries or blueberries for a different twist.

- 1 slice pound cake, wrapped in plastic wrap**
- 2/3 cup dried sweetened strawberries**
- 1 Tbsp almond butter**

In a small pot, bring 1/2 cup water and strawberries to a boil. Simmer until berries are plump and soft, about 5 minutes. Spread almond butter on cake slice, then spoon warm berries and desired amount of liquid over each (more liquid makes for moister cake).

**TRAIL POTATOES**

Do the hard work at home, then carry this luxurious meal base for a fun, easy first-night treat. We've given you four variations, but the possibilities are endless.

AT HOME → Boil a few small russet potatoes (about 2 per person) in a large pot. When the potatoes can be pierced with a fork yet remain firm in the center (about 15 minutes), scoop them out and drop them into an ice bath to cool for at least 20 minutes, adding more ice as needed (cooling the potatoes quickly will help them keep longer). Dry potatoes thoroughly. If you'll be warming them in a campfire, wrap in parchment paper, and then double wrap in aluminum foil.

IN CAMP → Campfire method: Once your fire has burned for about 20 minutes, create a bed of coals and set potatoes in the center, building coals carefully around them. Top with a generous amount of gently burning wood (forearm-size pieces are ideal) and allow potatoes to reheat for about 15 to 20 minutes. Pot method: Cover potatoes with water and bring to a boil, cooking for about 3 to 5 minutes, until they are tender in the center.

TOPPINGS BAR

Reheat your potatoes, split down the center, sprinkle with salt and pepper, then top with the combo of your choice.

CHILI TATERS GF

- 1/4 cup dehydrated chili (rehydrate with boiling water)**
- 1/4 cup shredded cheddar cheese**

BREAKFAST GF

- 2 Tbsp freeze-dried eggs, prepared according to package directions**
- 2 Tbsp bacon bits**
- Pro tip: smear potato with butter first.**

SIERRA STYLE GF V (2 servings; use 4+ potatoes)

- 1 whole avocado, sliced**
- 1 small can of salsa**

CHEESE LOVERS' GF

- 1 oz. cream cheese**
- 1/4 cup shredded pepper jack or Mexican cheese blend**

Stuff potato with cheeses and top with pepper. Carefully close potatoes and rewrap in foil. Let sit for several minutes to allow cheese to melt.

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Wildlife Portrait

Zoom in for an intimate shot that captures an animal's character. By Photo Editor Genny Fullerton

BIGHORN SHEEP RAM
SPECs: F/7.1, 1/25 SEC, ISO 250
420MM FOCAL LENGTH

BE PREPARED

Animal encounters can be fleeting, so practice by snapping squirrels, birds, or dogs at a local park. The more familiar you are with the camera, lens, and technique, the less you'll leave to chance on your next big trip. Keep your camera as handy as possible: in your pocket for smartphones or point-and-shoots, chest-mounted for DSLRs (see below).

USE SELECTIVE FOCUS

Emphasize your subject by blurring the background. Begin with your widest aperture, or use portrait mode if your camera offers it. Then, set the focus on the animal's eye. If the rest of the face is blurry, narrow the aperture to increase your depth of field. Refocus before each shot and as the animal moves.

ZOOM IN

Animals can enhance your landscape shots, but you don't need a spectacular background for an impressive wildlife photo. The closer and bigger you can make the animal look, the more the energy and excitement of the encounter will come through. If you can, zoom in so the animal's face fills the frame (but always keep a respectful distance from wild creatures).

SNAG THE MOMENT

Take a few test shots to dial in your settings, then slow down and be patient. Watch the animal and wait for compelling moments like eye contact and an engaging expression. Collect at least 20 options to choose from later. Avoid: chin down, chewing, patchy shadows on the face, background distractions.

PROCESS AT HOME

This can especially improve photos in which you couldn't control the light. Increase saturation and contrast and add some blacks to make the photo more dramatic. If you couldn't zoom in as much as you wanted, crop or subtly darken the edges to direct the viewer's eye to the animal's face (don't go overboard). For detailed tips, go to backpacker.com/processing.



KEEP YOUR DSLR READY Every second counts with an animal encounter, so strap your camera to your chest. Cheap: a case and two 'biners clipped to pack straps. Upgrade: The Cotton Carrier Camera Vest (\$149; 1 lb. 1 oz.; cottoncarrier.com), which our photographers swear by. Also, choose an ultrazoom lens, like the Sigma 18-300mm F3.5-6.3 DC Macro OS HSM (\$579; 1 lb. 5 oz.; sigmaphoto.com). It's lighter than carrying a second lens and allows you to quickly compose any shot, from wide-open scenics to up-close portraits.

For tips on increasing your animal encounters, go to backpacker.com/wildlife.

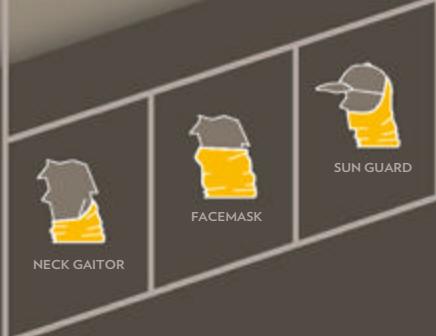
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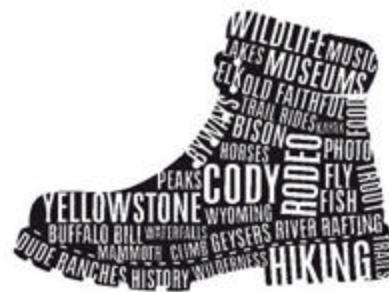
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survival



John Carlos
Mann, 29, got
lost in Alaska and
survived a blizzard
on Oct. 10, 2014.

As told to Chase
Scheinbaum

out alive:
hypothermic

“For several hours I shivered badly, sometimes going numb. I hardly slept. I just lay there in a trance.”



NATHANIEL WILDER

I WAS IN A ROCKY MEADOW, 22 MILES INTO ALASKA'S CHUGACH MOUNTAINS, WHEN THE CAIRNS I WAS FOLLOWING DISAPPEARED. IT WAS FALL, THE TEMPERATURE WAS CLOSE TO FREEZING, AND NIGHT WAS COMING, CASTING THE ROCK FIELD IN A FLAT, DUSKY SHADE AS IF ALL THE WORLD WAS IN A SHADOW. WITHOUT A MAP OR COMPASS, I COULD ONLY TRUST MY GUT.

Earlier that day, I had started the 24-mile-long Crow Pass Trail from Eagle River to Girdwood. Most people take two days, starting in Girdwood and losing 3,100 feet of elevation by the time they arrive in Anchorage. But I planned to do it faster, and in reverse, by myself. My friends were going to an Oktoberfest celebration in Girdwood and I intended to meet them there.

I'm just a casual Alaskan hiker looking to get in better shape and thought pushing myself on a big dayhike would help make that happen. The few friends who might have gone with me weren't available, but I went anyway; I love enjoying the outdoors alone. I'd heard the hike would take about 14 hours, so I packed a headlamp because I figured it would be dark by the time I rolled into Girdwood.

Morning was breaking when my buddy dropped me off at the trailhead. Just in case, I'd packed my down sleeping bag, an insulated jacket and pants, a raincoat, and an emergency blanket. I didn't bring a tent, though, or a map and compass—it's a popular route and I thought the trail would be easy enough to follow.

DARKNESS SPREAD as soon as I lost the trail, which had been following a stream. I deduced that if I just continued along the stream, I'd soon encounter the trail again. But, when I reached the end of the meadow, the creek splintered. I kept pushing. I knew I was lost but I wanted to get to town that night.

As I hiked, I wanted to blame anyone but myself—the meadow really needs cairns—but I knew I was the one who didn't bring a map.

I climbed a slope to a ridge, expecting to see the lights of Girdwood twinkling on the far side. But it was all dark. I was exhausted now, and miserable, but still in good shape. I knew I'd need to sleep out and temps might get below freezing. I dug under a huge rock that'd block the breeze, got into my sleeping bag, put the emergency blanket on top like a bivy sack, and put rocks on the corners to keep it in place. My bag was rated to -15°F. It got a little wet, but I was warm.

I woke up before sunrise and climbed on, thinking Girdwood had to be just on the other side of the ridge, but it wasn't. At daybreak, a blizzard blasted the ridge and I had to trudge through knee-deep snow. I was wearing uninsulated hiking boots and my feet got cold and started aching badly.

I climbed another ridge, thinking that this time, Girdwood lay on the other side for sure. Reaching the ridgeline felt like a moment of victory. But on the other side there were only more ridges and peaks. I knew I

was in trouble and started to beat up on myself for being unprepared. But to turn around would be to admit defeat, so I had to move forward.

I slid down a steep, snow-covered slope on the far side. I got going pretty fast—faster than I wanted to—and lost a glove. When I stopped, I knew right away that I was on a glacier. I was surrounded by steep ice with nowhere to go but down. I walked carefully for an hour, picking my way around crevasses, until I reached the base. At this point I was really tired and one of my feet was so cold I could feel pain to the bone. I was off the snow by now and took off a shoe—I don't know why—and walked like that for 30 minutes. Maybe it was adrenaline, maybe numbness, but the pain faded.

I came across a huge creek that I figured drained into Turnagain Arm and could at least lead me to the Seward Highway. I followed it through steep terrain, dense alders, and downed trees. My feet got really wet crossing several small streams and I ate the last of my food. I bushwhacked along the creek, climbing to avoid the densest vegetation and descending to make sure I stayed by the creek. Progress was really slow, and I began to feel more and more defeated. I thought about throwing myself to the boulders in the creek. They would rip me apart. It would be over so fast.

Finally, I reached a moose trail. There were some flat sections and I put in several miles very fast. I pushed into falling darkness until I was unable to see, turned on my headlamp, and kept going to get as much distance as I could. When I came to a fallen tree, at about 3 a.m., I decided I needed rest. Everything I had was wet but I crawled into my down sleeping bag and again wrapped it in the emergency blanket and put rocks on the corners, which made the thin material start to tear in the wind. For several hours I shivered badly, sometimes going numb. I hardly slept. I just lay there in a trance.

Sunday proved to be the most challenging day because I was utterly spent. The vegetation got thick again, and my legs were so tired I could barely lift them. I was delirious. I sang songs and recited poems. One was the epigraph of Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*: "Old longings nomadic leap, Chafing at custom's chain; Again from its brumal sleep Wakens the ferine strain."

By the afternoon, I still hadn't found a road. I realized that I could die out there. Around 3 p.m., I felt like I needed sleep. I removed my wet shoes and socks and pulled out my soaked-through sleeping bag. I got in and 10 minutes later, I was shivering crazily. I could feel my arms and legs going numb. The veins in my hands were bright blue.

I was thinking of my mom, of her hearing the news that her son died. I'm an only child. I thought about my friends, too, but mostly my family. I knew if I was to stay that night, I was not going to wake up. I said to myself, *I'm not going to go out without a fight*. I put my shoes and socks back on and wrapped my hands and feet



MAP BY GOOGLE EARTH

in the shreds of the emergency blanket. I could barely feel my knees or ankles. I was staggering like a drunk.

My headlamp was dead now, but just then I saw something magnificent: a little piece of orange tape hanging on a branch. It had been two days since I saw anything man-made. A little while later, I saw a cut I knew was made by a chain saw. Sure enough, minutes later, I found another piece of orange tape and then a trail. It wasn't well-maintained but it led to a tiny parking lot for ATVs.

I followed this trail in complete darkness, guided only by dim moonlight reflecting on pools of water in the ATV trail. I was crying out loud for help. Eventually, I saw another magnificent sight: lights in the windows of homes. I was in a lot of pain. I cried for help but no one came outside. In my delirium, I decided not to bother these people because I knew the highway was close by.

I tried to hitchhike but no one would stop at 10:30 p.m. I looked like a miserable, beat-up homeless guy. Probably 100 cars went by and none stopped. Finally, I made it to a rustic motel, the Birdridge Motel & RV Park. I saw people inside the living room. I said, "Please help! I'm not a bandit." After five minutes of this, a man opened the door. He was the kindest person. He was with his wife and three kids—one was a newborn baby.

He poured me chicken broth and hot tea, and lit the wood stove. It only took 20 minutes for me to start feeling better. It was the best cup of chicken broth I ever tasted.

key
skills

COLD + WET = WORLD OF PAIN

Self-diagnose hypothermia

Here's the thing about hypothermia: If you have it, like John Carlos Mann did, your brain will be too fuzzed up to realize it. Here's the other thing: If you don't actively treat hypothermia, it only gets worse. When hiking with a buddy, check in with your partner and diagnose hypothermia's telltale "umbles" (stumbles, mumbles, fumbles, and grumbles). Not so easy by yourself. We asked Jennifer Dow, medical director for the National Park Service's Alaska region, for her best tips on how to do it solo.

1. Think of hypothermia as a continuum.
Cold is the first step. If you feel chilled and/or your clothing is wet, stop, adjust your layers or change into dry clothes, and eat sugar and protein for fuel.

2. Pay attention to your fine motor skills.
Dropping your gloves? Can't tie your shoes? Having a hard time zipping your jacket? Don't brush off these warning signs. "The early signs of intoxication are very similar to the early signs of hypothermia," Dow says.

3. Take shivering seriously.

This may be your last chance to head-off more severe hypothermia. Shivering is the body's frantic effort to heat itself and it burns a ton of fuel attempting to do so. Consider this your final warning.

4. Above all, know when hypothermia could affect you.
Hypothermia is more common at milder temperatures than sub-freezing ones, because people heading out into freezing conditions are generally prepared for them, Dow says.

PHOTO / DAN HOLZ



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The Forest and the Trees

Lost in the woods?
You're in luck. These six techniques will keep you so comfy, you may not want to be found.

By Jason Schwartz,
Rocky Mountain Bushcraft

MAKE A SHELTER

Look for ready-made shelters, like blowdowns, or trees with dense, low canopies. Otherwise, build: Lean large branches against a solid object (live trees, stumps, boulders, or cliffs) to make a lean-to. Layer leaves, pine boughs, palm fronds, or large sections of bark to make your roof water-resistant. Cushion the floor with an arm's length of leaves, dried grass, or pine boughs for insulation, and pile another stack on top of you.

MAKE A FIRE...

Look for flammable, resin-rich fatwood in the knots of dead pines, then shave it into a tinder pile, or dig around in dry-rotted wood for spongy punkwood, which easily takes a spark.

...AND TAKE IT WITH YOU

Use your knife to baton a 6-inch-deep cross into the end of a wrist-thick log. Pack the space with green sticks to hold it open, pack in some tinder, and light your torch.

TREAT PAIN

Pierce the blisters that form on balsam, white, subalpine, and Douglas firs to access a clear antibacterial resin that's great for burns and cuts. Chew (don't swallow) the bark of willows and the leaves of aspens to release salicin, an anti-inflammatory like aspirin.

FORAGE A MEAL

You can eat acorns: Remove the nutmeat and soak it for multiple hours in several changes of water until the bitter taste is gone. Pinecones of Western pines also produce edible nuts in late summer and fall. Both can be eaten raw.

CRAFT A DRINKING VESSEL

Cut a piece of birch bark into an 8-by-8-inch square. Pinch the corners to raise an edge and fasten it with an improvised clothespin (partially split twig).



den mother



Spitting Venom

Alone, miles away, and snakebit. There's a better strategy than panic.

What should you do if you are bitten by a venomous snake (let's say a rattler) deep in the backcountry? Is this when you make your peace?

- Nicholas Moenck, via email

→ Yes, make the peace—but not with your mortality. Not yet, anyway. You need to calm down, so pray to your maker if that'll help chill you out. Running around like your hair's on fire is only going to pump the venom through your system faster. Ditto, rage-killing the snake. But you should try to ID it (see below) so you can get the right antivenin. This should help you relax: Fewer than five people in the U.S. die each year by snake envenomation. So, take a nice, big, deep breath. Now, check the wound. See two telltale holes on either side

of the teethmarks? Those would be from the fangs. No holes, no venom. If you do have 'em, there's no way to know how much venom you got, so may as well assume you got a little bite. Now, wrap the wound tight—these wounds can be bleeders—but not so tight it cuts off your circulation, and remove constrictive items like jewelry or watches if you got bit on the hand, or unlace your boot (but leave it on) if you got it in the ankle. Gather up your essential gear, food, and water, grab a walking stick, and get to moving—slow and steady. Keep your heart rate low, and stick to trails so searchers and other hikers can find you. Even minor envenomations are prone to infection, so you'll want to get that looked at.

Follow-up: In the March issue, Den Mother said

drinking pee in a survival situation is never smart. Life rafts have enema bags. Does that mean your colon can absorb the water from urine without the salt and minerals?

- Mark Commons, via email

→ I like where your head's at, but those enema bags are for people so stricken with seasickness that they can't take liquid by mouth. You have to put fresh water up there. Flowing pee in your rear isn't going to help with hydration. "This does not filter out impurities or toxins in the absorbed fluid," says Henderson McGinnis, M.D., professor of emergency medicine at Wake Forest. Same goes for seawater. Thanks for the image, though.

Got a question for Den Mother? Email it to denmother@backpacker.com.

WHAT BIT YA?



Coral: South and Southwest



Cottonmouth: South



Eastern rattlesnake: Southeast



Diamondback rattlesnake: Southwest (other species live elsewhere)

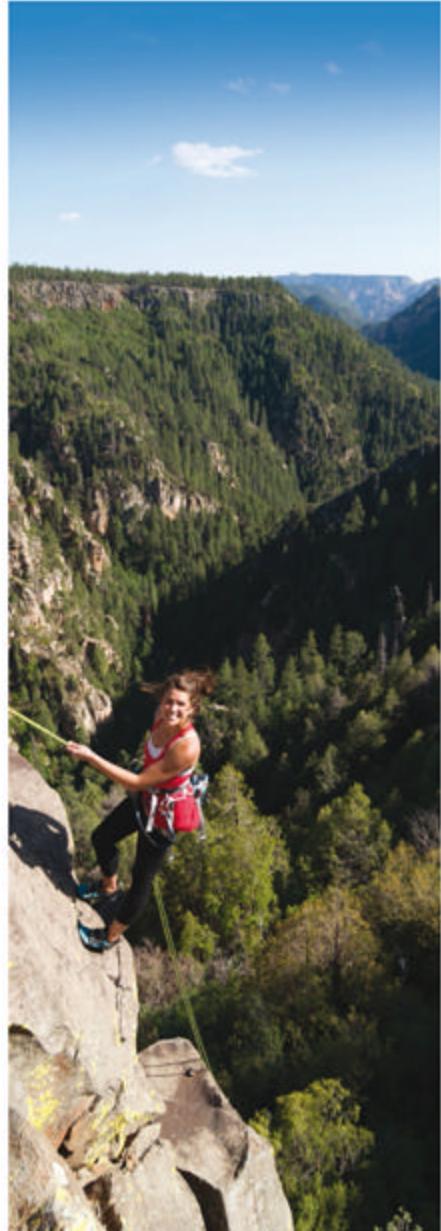
Pit vipers (rattlesnakes, copperheads, cottonmouths) are venomous. Their heads look like this.



Bite Mark

Fangs

Teeth



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Just Add Water

PHOTO BY ANDREW BYDOLON

Hydration packs
for every hiker
and budget
By Nancy Bouchard

You're not one to show up at the trailhead with an Evian bottle in your shorts pocket. No, your dayhikes are sunrise-to-sunset adventures that demand a hydration pack to match. We rounded up 14 we hoped could handle a day's worth of gear and plenty of easy-access water. Then we hammered them for nine months on four continents, in temps from triple-digits to subfreezing. In the end, we narrowed it down to these six packs. No matter how big your day, they'll get you through with maximum comfort and stability.

Test data 278 days / 2,300 miles hiked /
58,000 feet elevation gain & loss / 560 liters consumed



field test hydration daypacks

Salomon Agile² 12 Set

Why we like it

Thanks to a form-hugging fit, this is the next best thing to wearing no pack at all.



CamelBak Pursuit 24 LR



Bergans of Norway Rondane 12

Hydration

4.8 A 13-inch side zipper lets you access the pocket containing the included 1.5-liter Hydrapak reservoir without removing the pack's contents. Bonus: The neoprene sleeve kept the tube from freezing on a cold spring ascent of Oregon's Tumalo Mountain.

4.5 CamelBak's triangular-shaped, 3-liter reservoir sits at your lumbar behind a zippered, easy-access door (like the Salomon, no need to empty the pack). Ding: The reservoir's circular opening is awkward to handle; we found it tricky to fill to the brim without spilling.

4.5 The 2-liter Source reservoir has a 6-inch-wide mouth for easy filling and a bite valve cover that keeps dirt out. We wished they all had this latter feature.

Comfort

4.4 This is the only frameless pack here. It's constructed like a vest, with the wide shoulder straps, hipbelt wings, and packbag forming one continuous piece of mesh and foam. The whole thing wraps around you like a second skin, but can only handle loads up to 10 pounds (including water).

4.5 Thanks to the low and tight center of gravity, the Pursuit is ideal for scrambling. Loads up to 22 pounds (the biggest in the test) disappeared on our backs.

4.6 A distinctive shock-cord system glues this pack tight to the body: Dual sternum straps crank down on the upper and lower torso; another set of cords runs from the lower shoulder straps to the packbag.

Packing

3.8 On long runs and dayhikes in Baja, Mexico, we appreciated the roomy mesh side pockets (each big enough for an orange and extra layer), which close via drawstrings that double as compression for the whole pack.

4.0 Best front pocket: The 12-by-7-inch stretch mesh pocket held all our wet gear after a day of hiking and swimming at Hanakapi'ai Falls in Hawaii. Props: Tubular metal zipper pulls are easy to grab even with gloves.

3.5 Two long, mesh shoulder-strap pockets keep snacks or a phone at the ready; a bungee on the front secures a helmet. This helps with compression, but shove-it pouches on the other packs are more versatile.

Ventilation

3.5 The meshy hipbelt is breezy, but half our team reported sweaty lower backs on long runs and uphill slogs.

3.9 It has suspended mesh across the mid back, but thick lumbar padding makes this one hotter than the other trampoline-style packs.

2.9 This was the sweatiest pack in the test because the glued-on fit leaves little room for airflow (a trade-off for superior stability).

Overall

4.6

\$120; 1 lb. 15 oz.; one size;
salomon.com

4.3

\$150; 3 lbs. 2 oz. (m's);
m's and w's; camelbak.com

4.2

\$109; 1 lb. 5 oz.; one
size; bergans.com



Osprey Syncro 15

In hot temps, this pack kept us coolest, thanks to max airflow across the back.

3.9 V-shaped "baffles" inside the 2.5-liter reservoir minimize slosh. A hose quick-release at shoulder level allows for easier refilling and keeps working parts outside the bag; if there's a leak, you'll catch it fast. A shoulder strap magnet keeps the hose in place, but the bladder constantly slipped off the rudimentary hook meant to hold it.

4.1 A trampoline-style, mesh backpanel supports loads up to 15 pounds with minimal sway. The yoke-like shoulder straps distribute weight evenly across the back.

4.4 Two front pockets keep gear well organized. A bungee on the front accommodates a helmet and a polyester-lined pocket holds glasses without scratching. Bonus: This is the only pack here with an integrated rain cover.

4.6 The trampoline-style suspension provides excellent air circulation, and plentiful slots in the foam and mesh shoulder straps enhance airflow.

4.0

\$120; 1lb. 10 oz. (M/L); two unisex sizes; ospreypacks.com



Marmot Aquifer 22

A drybag-style closure makes this pack the most functionally waterproof.

3.5 The 3-liter Hydrapak reservoir has a slosh-control baffle that separates to allow for easy cleaning and drying. It has a good bite valve with an easy flow, but make sure the pressure-fit hose attachment is sealed securely. One tester accidentally pulled the tube out and ended up with a pack full of water.

4.0 Wide shoulder straps and a stiff framesheet can handle loads up to 20 pounds, but we wished for a beefier hipbelt for better load transfer.

4.1 The roll-top closure opens the packbag wide for easy loading and seals out rain better than the rest. It's not submersible, but the PU coating on the fabric makes it highly water-resistant. It withstood a 45-minute deluge in Oregon.

3.0 Thick foam on the shoulder straps and backpanel cushion big loads, but after a hot dayhike in Joshua Tree National Park, one tester's back was pretty soaked.

3.5

\$119; 1lb. 5 oz.; one size; marmot.com



Dakine Drafter 12L

Plentiful pockets will please the most obsessive organizers.

4.2 This narrow, 3-liter Hydrapak system has a fixed interior baffle and a shoulder strap magnet that keeps the bite valve in easy reach (like the Osprey). Note: The pack has a hose port only on the left side, a bummer for hikers who like to thread the tube on the right.

2.9 The soft, textured webbing on the shoulder straps and hipbelt is grabby and hard to adjust, so this pack jiggled more than most.

4.6 A U-shaped zipper lets you peel open the entire pack, which is loaded with variously sized pockets (including a fleecy one for glasses) and sleeves that fit a laptop or tablet, camera gear, and other small essentials. Plus, a shove-it pouch fits a helmet.

4 The trampoline backpanel kept us cool on a mid-50s day that was so humid it was like walking inside a cloud. But the curved framesheet pinches the packbag, hindering loading.

3.3

\$125; 2 lbs. 11 oz. (w's); m's and w's; dakine.com



CLEAN YOUR SYSTEM

Fill reservoir with hot water and 2 teaspoons of baking soda or bleach. Shake.

Let sit for 30 minutes; drain through tube.

Wash bladder with hot water and a drop of mild dish soap.

Rinse extremely well, flushing water through the tube.

Air dry completely.

UPGRADE YOUR H2O
Find our testers' favorite drink mixes at backpacker.com/drinkmix.





Hang in There

Once you go hammock, you never go back. Or so say fans of these light and comfy rigs. We hammered 18 slings for 10 months to find the right one for every hiker. By Joe Flowers

BARGAIN FEATHERWEIGHT Grand Trunks Ultralight Travel



This 12-ounce polypropylene perch disappears into any pack and takes only two minutes to hang, so you won't hesitate to bring it on every

hike. We used it for daily lunch breaks on the trail and as an ultralight bed on a 15-day trip in the Colombian Amazon. Tip: Learn the slipped sheet bend knot, so you can remove the steel carabiners and save 2 ounces. Downside: It's small (best for people under 5'11" and 200 pounds) and offers no bug or weather protection. \$20; 12 oz.; [grandtrunk.com](#)

BUG PROTECTION Exped Scout Hammock Combi



Want to test bugproofness? Head into a South Carolina swamp during mosquito season. In conditions that had some folks running for the car, the Scout proved a better refuge than competitors. Why? A double layer of ripstop polyester is thick enough to thwart bites from penetrating the underside (and it doubles as a sleeping pad sleeve in winter). Plus, integrated sleeves and loops allow you to rig the mosquito netting with trekking poles or cordage so it pulls away from you (more interior space)—or even pitch it as a ground shelter. Tarp included. \$200; 3 lbs. 12 oz.; [exped.com](#)

FULL-FEATURED Sierra Madre Research Adventura Combo



The Adventura is a three-part system: the hammock, a pair of slings, and the versatile Nubé

shelter. The Nubé is a shaped, waterproof tarp. It has a hanging mesh bug screen and an integrated gear sling that keeps up to 200 pounds of supplies dry and easily accessible underneath you. Also cool: You can roll up and clip back the hammock, bug net, and sling, and just use the Nubé as a cooking tarp. The Nubé engulfs the hammock like an A-frame tent, while cinchable closures on each end seal out even blowing rain and keep water from wicking down the straps (fixing a common hammock problem). During a weeklong trip in Virginia's Jefferson National Forest, the Adventura withstood hail and freezing rain. Downsides: It's pricey, weighty, and setup takes practice. \$399; 4 lbs. 14 oz.; [smrgearme.com](#)

MOST COMFORTABLE Exped Ergo Hammock Combi



After four different testers used the Ergo in everything from subzero temps (-26°F in Minnesota) to subtropical (80°F in Georgia), here's the verdict: It's the king of comfort, and it managed

to convert several hammock skeptics, thanks to its innovative flat hang. It works like a suspension bridge to create a sleeping surface that's perpendicular to your two hanging trees, and supported by a fan of cordage all along each side of your body, not just the head and foot (goodbye, banana shape). You can pitch the 7-by-9-foot tarp alone or over the hammock; open it wide for max ventilation or close it down to keep the weather out. The integrated bug netting stows into its own pocket, and a sleeve under the hammock fits a pad in cold weather or can be used for storage. Caveat: It's a little short; people over 6' felt cramped. \$379; 2 lbs. 14 oz.; [exped.com](#)

DOUBLE DATE Kammok Roo



There are plenty of two-person hammocks out there, but the Roo is the best we've found. It's longer (10 feet, so you can sleep staggered head to toe or stretch out diagonally) and stronger (500-pound capacity) than most competitors. And the silky-soft ripstop nylon is untreated, so it doesn't feel crinkly or stick to bare backs, even in the sweltering 100°F temps we encountered in the Dominican Republic. (It has no weather protection, but when the Roo got damp, it dried within minutes.) \$99; 1 lb. 7 oz.; [kammok.com](#)

Don't miss the 9th annual...

PCT DAYS

August 28-30, 2015 • Marine Park, Cascade Locks, Oregon

GEAR FAIR

Learn about outdoor products from PCT DAYS sponsors. Whether you are looking for tents, clothing, backpacks, camp stoves, etc...it's all going to be here!

FREE CLASSES

Participate in one of the free classes on Saturday, which includes Hiking with Dogs, Leave No Trace, and Intro to Backpacking.

TRAIL WORK PARTY

Friday, August 28th. Give back to the trail by joining a work party on the Pacific Crest Trail! Contact Dana: dhendricks@pcta.org.

GEAR RAFFLES

Don't miss your chance to win awesome gear at the two raffles on Saturday!

ACTIVITIES

Participate in games, contests, & activities at select sponsor booths!

EVENT CAMPING

1 night, \$10 per person,
2 nights, \$20 per person. Under 18 free. Register to camp at www.pctdays.com.

The 9th Annual Pacific Crest Trail Days

will take place August 28-30, 2015 at the Marine Park in Cascade Locks, Oregon. PCT DAYS offers a great way for the public to check out the latest outdoor products of exhibiting sponsors at the gear fair, participate in free outdoor classes & activities, win gear at the two raffles, explore one of the regional trails or bike paths, and to relax in an amazing setting. All raffle proceeds are donated to the **American Long Distance Hiking Association-West** and the **Pacific Crest Trail Association**, so don't miss the chance to win amazing gear and support two great organizations! Last year's event had about 1200 attendees, over 40 exhibiting sponsors, and was a great time for a great cause. In addition to the great lineup of classes for this year's event, title sponsor **Backpacker Magazine's Get Out More Tour** will be attending and presenting a class on what else....Backpacking!

PCT DAYS is family-friendly and free to attend and onsite camping at Thunder Island is available for \$10 per person, per night and \$20 per person for both nights. Camping is available on Friday and Saturday nights only and reservations can be made at www.pctdays.com. For those who don't wish to camp, hotels are available in town and an RV campsite is in the Marine Park. Local food & beverage vendors will be on-hand and there are several restaurants and a grocery store within walking distance of the event site.



Cascade Locks is 42 miles east of Portland and 20 miles west of Hood River just off I-84. From I-84, take the Cascade Locks exit, Thunder Island/Marine Park is a left just off of WaNaPa (Main) Street. To plan your stay or for more info on Cascade Locks, visit: <http://www.cascadelocks.net>.



*For event information,
visit www.pctdays.com*
*To volunteer, please email:
pctdaysvol@gmail.com*

field notes

The latest word from our testers

bargain

Optic Nerve V12



Usually you have to choose between max coverage and visual clarity in shades. But the V12 offers both because

of toric lenses, which have different horizontal and vertical curves. They wrap closely around the face (with what's called an 8 base curve; a higher number means more curve) for coverage, while the vertical plane is nearly flat (4 base curve) for clarity. Plus, we experienced no peripheral distortion, thanks to the tapered edges. Bummer: Toric lenses aren't RX-compatible. \$99; .7 oz.; opticnerve.com

luxe

NEMO Equipment Wagontop 4P



This is a first: a single-wall, 4-person tent for basecamping. Single-wall design is typically used for ultralight or high-mountain shelters, as it offers a simpler setup, a tighter packed size, and lighter weight (all because there's no rainfly). The tradeoffs? Single-walls are colder and more prone to condensation. The Wagontop sleeps a

bit cooler than a conventional double-wall, but it's so big and well-ventilated that condensation isn't a problem. It's a lavish palace (69 square feet, 78-inch peak height) with vertical sidewalls: During a California road trip, we piled in four people and mountains of gear with plenty of room to spare. The tall structure held firm in gusty rainstorms in Washington. Setup is easy (no separate fly to tangle with), and the removable vestibule adds 27 square feet of storage. Best of all, when it's time to load up the car, the Wagontop packs neatly into a duffle bag that's about a third of the size (28x10x10 inches) of other family tents. \$450; 18 lbs. 2 oz.; nemoequipment.com

upgrade

Black Diamond Ember Power Light



Reconsider the lowly flashlight: We used this new take on the old-school light as a backup for headlamps and also to revive dead smartphones on multiday trips. The Ember has a bright LED beam (150 lumens) and a rechargeable battery (2,600mAh) that provides enough juice to bring an iPhone 6 from a 15 percent charge to 100 percent, according to our tests. Just twist the

ENO

enonation.com

handle to expose the USB port. An oval touchpad allows you to swipe the light on or off—as well as adjust brightness levels—and a green light turns red when the power level dips below 20 percent. \$50; 3.4 oz.; [blackdiamond-equipment.com](#)

versatile layer

Patagonia Nano-Air Vest



Get core warmth without bulk: This light-as-air vest is so

comfy you'll wear it for days on end, under and over other layers. We found it useful in almost every scenario, from 60°F

fall hikes to chilly Vermont ski tours. Its success comes from a trim fit (for warmth) combined with unparalleled elasticity. The ripstop nylon shell has four-way mechanical stretch (no Lycra, which ups weight and slows dry time), and Patagonia's FullRange synthetic fill also stretches. Plus, it packs to softball size. \$199; 6.8 oz. (w's S); [patagonia.com](#)

multisport

Evolv Cruzer



Sticky climbing rubber and an EVA midsole make this shoe at home

on the crag or trail. Thanks to its microfiber-lined canvas upper, soft cushioning along the top of the foot, and a thin memory foam insole, the Cruzer—like a rock shoe—is comfortable sockless. We liked the low-drop, minimalist feel: They're comfortable as camp shoes (the heels fold down so you can wear them as slides), but we can climb in them, too. Smooth toe edges grip tiny ledges and smear on slabs. The sticky rubber outsole helped us crush up to 5.9 routes. Caveat: Shoes this light don't last forever. We noticed some worn seams and peeling toe rubber after three months of near-constant wear. \$75; 15 oz.; m's 7-14; [evolvsports.com](#)



Ask Kristin

Tips from the gear editor

Q: My clothes got soaked on the first day of a multiday trip and the forecast calls for nothing but cold, overcast skies. How can I dry them fast without sun?

A: It's not easy, and if the conditions are really lousy, it's nearly impossible. **Tip #1:** Put your body heat to work. If your clothes are soaping, stop, wring them

out, then put them back on and keep hiking. At camp, add warm layers on top. **Tip #2:** At bedtime, if they're still damp and you're feeling shivery, change into your long johns. (Always pack a dry pair to sleep in.) Lay wet clothes flat inside your bag so they still get hit with body heat. (On a cold, damp night, hanging wet clothes on a line inside your tent never works.) If clothes are getting dryer and you feel warm, leave them on and let your body continue to work overnight. **Tip #3:** Snuggle up with a hot water bottle or two or a couple of chemical warming packs. Ask your own questions at [backpacker.com/askkristin](#).



TECH 2 SERIES FRAME PACKS

High Sierra Tech 2 Series internal frame packs combine the very best in functionality, materials and adjustability to get you through any trail bound adventure. Tech 2 Series is available in a wide variety of sizes, fit and colors.

High Sierra. Adventure this way.



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EDITED BY CASEY LYONS



059



When the lights go down in the city:
A hiker overlooks Salt Lake City and the
Oquirrh Mountains from the Bonneville
Shoreline Trail. Turn to page 68 for more
Salt Lake City hikes.



NEW YORK CITY

CAMPING IN THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS

SPEND A WILD NIGHT UNDER THE STARS—WITHOUT LEAVING THE CITY.

BY DENNIS LEWON



It was after 10 p.m. and pitch dark under the trees. No streetlights, no car lights, no neon lights. Just a forest, inky black, and the soft chirp of an unidentified bird breaking through the low hum of the city.

The city. It was out there, just beyond the bubble of darkness, a metropolis of almost 9 million souls, impossibly close yet very, very far away. I'd never thought of going into the heart of the city in order to escape it, but that's exactly what a night in Central Park promised.

By the light of headlamps, we walked along a trail that wound through the secluded North Woods. The trees seemed taller at night. Denser. It felt like we'd hiked for miles—not blocks—to get here. Central Park was still open, technically, but no one was around to witness this odd procession of hikers skirting The Pool, our lights reflected in the mirror-calm water. Most prudent walkers, joggers, and bikers had long since departed. Soon, the 843-acre park would officially close for the night, leaving only squirrels, lawbreakers, and us.

I was there with a few dozen other lucky campers. When we'd pitched our tents on the Great Hill earlier, before sunset, some passersby turned their heads—which is saying something in New York—but we weren't worried about getting busted. A crew of Urban Park Rangers had helped us pick the site. Now

our uniformed guides led the late-night hike through the dark forest. One had brought speakers on which he played a recording of a great horned owl, hoping to elicit a response from the real thing. He encouraged us to turn off our headlamps and listen for the reticent birds. No luck tonight.

When we returned to the tents and crawled into our sleeping bags, I lay awake for a long time. At first, worry kept me up. I confess I was a little nervous about midnight visitors—the two-legged kind—so I listened for footsteps the way one might listen for a bear in Yellowstone. Nothing. Eventually, I simply stayed awake because of a change I hadn't expected. By focusing so narrowly on nearby sounds—a cricket, the wind—I detected silence where before the city intruded.

And I realized something else. To borrow from a popular song: If you can find peace and quiet here, you can find it anywhere.

Trip Planner

The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation hosts camp nights in all five boroughs. The popular overnight in Central Park accommodates 30 campers, and spots are allotted by lottery through an online registration system (free). The next Central Park campout is June 18, 2015. Register for the lottery on June 3. **Info** nycgovparks.org

CENTRAL PARK'S
NORTH MEADOW



DAYHIKE

LONG PATH/SHORE TRAIL, PALISADES INTERSTATE PARK

There are 2,000 miles of trails within 30 minutes of Manhattan, but none have more continuous scrambling than this 4.5-mile loop tracing the 500-foot Palisades cliffs. Head south on the Long Path from State Line Lookout toward the Forest View Trail. After descending to the river, tackle class 2 and 3 scrambling through the Giant Stairs. At 50-foot Peanut Leap Cascade, ascend the bluffs and loop back. **Trailhead** 40.988418, -73.907390* **Drive time** 35 mins. **Info** njpalisades.org

OVERNIGHT

SLIDE-CORNELL- WITTENBERG, CATSKILLS

Bag a trio of peaks via airy ridges, trail ladders, and scrambling on this classic 10-mile out-and-back in the Catskills, the New York area's best back-country destination. Head east on the Phoenicia-East Branch Trail, climb 4,180-foot Slide Mountain, then descend on ladders. Camp at the designated spot between Slide and Cornell (mile 3.5). Next day, bag Wittenberg for a view of green rollers. **Trailhead** 42.008675, -74.427475 **Drive time** 2 hrs. 30 mins. **Info** backpacker.com/slides-co-witt

BOSTON

AFTER WORK

CRYSTAL SPRING TRAIL, MIDDLESEX FELLS RESERVATION

Unless you live in Dot or Southie, going north to the Fells makes for a quicker woodsy escape than heading to Milton. Ramble along the easy, 1.4-mile Crystal Spring Trail loop, which begins by the eastern shore of Spot Pond. Skirt the summit of 78-foot Whip Hill where dogwoods flower in spring, and turn blaze orange come fall. End back on Wyoming Ave. (2 miles north of the Orange Line Oak Grove stop). **Trailhead** 42.458136, -71.087766 **Drive time** 20 mins. **Info** bit.do/CrystalSpring



A LOCAL INSTITUTION

Hilton's Tent City has occupied a four-story spot on Friend Street (near the Garden) and has been dispensing gear tips and trail advice since 1942. hiltonstentcity.com

DAYHIKE

SKYLINE TRAIL, BLUE HILLS RESERVATION

The deepest woods close to Boston lie in the Blue Hills, and this 11.6-mile out-and-back rolls up and down them. From the Trailside Museum, climb west on the Coon Hollow Path (use the left branch). Grab the Skyline Trail atop Great Blue Hill (635 feet), and travel over Chickatawbut, Fenno, Kitchamakin, and Nahanton Hills, with views over the Harbor. Turn around there. **Trailhead** 42.216043, -71.119201 **Drive time** 30 mins. **Info** bit.do/BlueHills

OVERNIGHT

SQUAM RANGE TRAVERSE, WHITE MOUNTAIN NF

Bostonians know the best hiking around is beyond the state liquor stores up north. But this route is neither as far as the Presidents, nor as hard on the legs. That doesn't mean easy: This 11.9-mile (one way) slice of the Squam Range starts on Sandwich Notch Road and heads south, hitting Mt. Squam, East Doublehead, Mt. Percival, Mt. Morgan, Mt. Webster, Mt. Livermore, and Cotton Mountain—five stand taller than 2,000 feet. Drop off Mt. Percival for water. End at NH 113. **Trailhead** 43.828800, -71.501040 **Drive time** 2 hrs. 15 mins. **Info** fs.usda.gov/whitemountain



VIEW FROM
MT. MORGAN

*FOR TURN-BY-TURN DRIVING DIRECTIONS,
PLUG THE LAT/LONG INTO GOOGLE MAPS.

BRIDLE TRAILS
STATE PARK

SEATTLE

AFTER WORK

COYOTE TRAIL LOOP, BRIDLE TRAILS STATE PARK

Showy preserves like Discovery and Seward Parks lure in the lion's share of visitors, leaving this East Side gem quiet even on sunny days. Wander through 482 acres of giant western red cedar, bigleaf maple, lush salal, and bushy ferns, and pack an extra Ziploc for the park's abundant salmonberries (ripe in June), blackberries (August), and morels (November). Hike the 3.5-mile Coyote Trail loop to circle most of the park (add on the 1.7-mile Trillium Trail and the 1-mile Raven Trail, both loops, for a longer walk or run). **Trailhead** 47.655054, -122.184298 **Drive time** 20 mins. **Info** \$10 daily use fee (or buy the annual Discover Pass; \$30, discoverpass.wa.gov); bit.do/BridleTrails



HIKER NOSH

The Noble Fir is a great little restaurant and bar in Ballard that's stocked with local hiking guidebooks and maps—the owners are wilderness lovers.

thenoblefir.com

DAYHIKE

BANDERA MOUNTAIN, MT. BAKER-SNOQUALMIE NF

The peaks east of Seattle are thick with trails and Cascades vistas, but the 7.8-mile (round-trip) hike to this 5,241-foot peak is the locals' choice for its beargrass-dotted meadows, lake views, and supremely steep summit approach. From the Ira Spring trailhead, ascend through an evergreen forest, then pop out of the trees to views spanning the Snoqualmie Valley. Hurtle up the final push to the summit ridge—so steep, you can touch your next switchback—for a mountaintop view reaching to Mt. Rainier and beyond. **Trailhead** 47.424690, -121.583462 **Drive time** 50 mins. **Info** National Forest Day Pass (\$5) required; fs.usda.gov/mbs

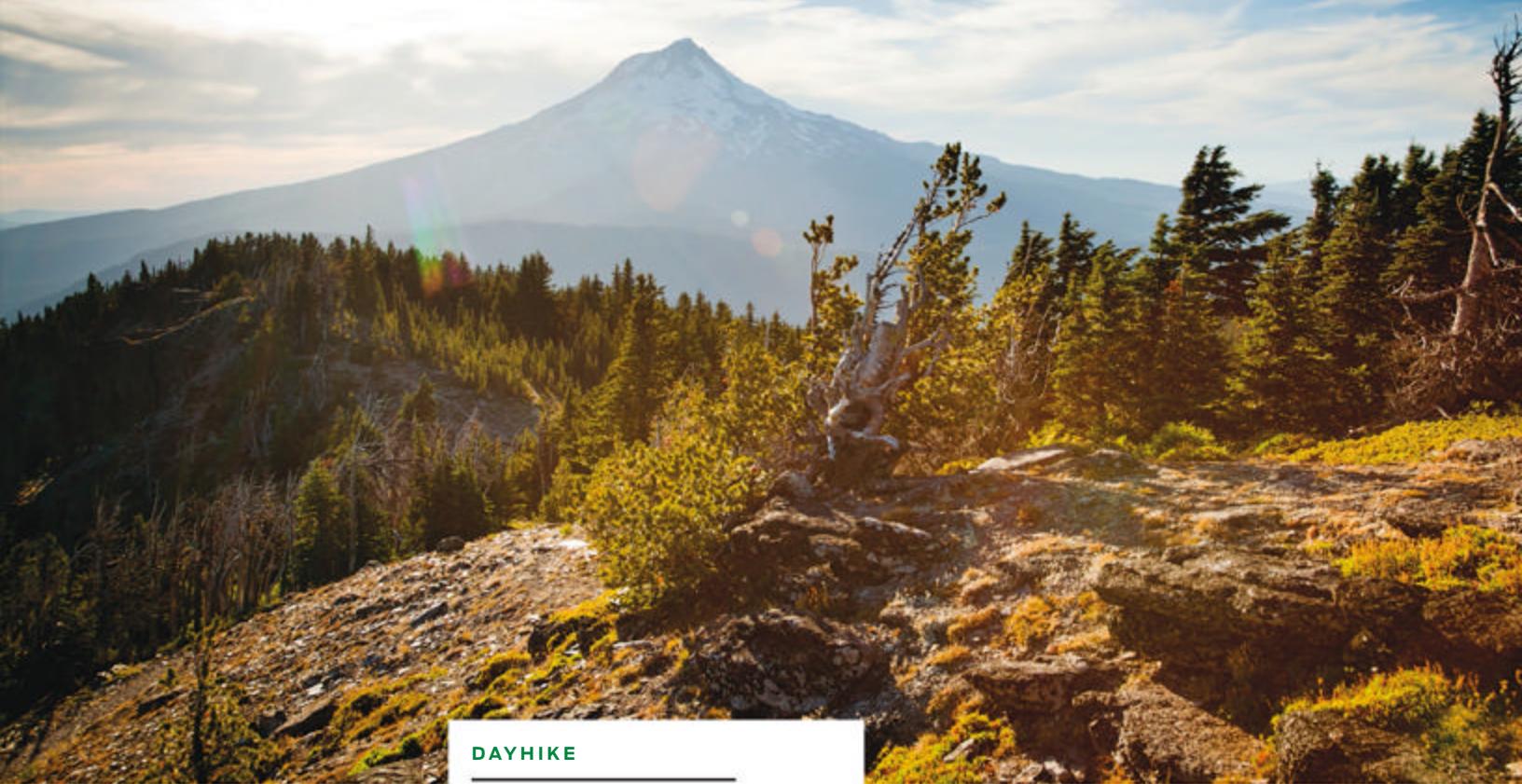
OVERNIGHT

GOTHIC BASIN, MT. BAKER-SNOQUALMIE NF

Seattleites usually can't spend a night in a campsite this nice without getting lucky in a permit lottery. But somehow, Gothic Basin's sea of pointy peaks, scatter-gem lakes, and boulder-strewn tundra remain open to anyone willing to climb 4.5 miles and 2,800 feet to reach them. From Barlow Pass, skirt the Sauk River on an old roadbed for a mile before jerking skyward on the Weeden Creek Trail. The route turns scrambly in places after you pass the 40-foot waterfall locally known as King Kong's Shower, then ascends to the basin (tangled with wildflowers in July). Scout for an established campsite in this fragile subalpine environment: The prize perch sits near 35-foot-deep Foggy Lake, a clear pool under 6,213-foot Gothic Peak and 6,613-foot Del Campo Peak (class 3 and 4 summits worthy of a climb). **Trailhead** 48.025926, -121.443686 **Drive time** 1 hr. 20 mins. **Info** National Forest Day Pass (\$5) required; fs.usda.gov/mbs

PORTLAND

MT. HOOD
FROM LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN



AFTER WORK

TRIPLE FALLS, COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE

A funny truth about living in Portland: We've got waterfalls that we barely notice and never bother to name, which, in other parts of the country, would get a million visitors every year. This 4.5-mile loop, with free parking, will show you five of the best waterfalls for minimal effort. Start from Horsetail Falls, a 176-foot roadside gusher, and climb above Ponytail Falls, which erupts from a narrow crevice 75 feet high. Just above 65-foot Oneonta Falls, follow the creek through old-growth forest to 85-foot Triple Falls, where Oneonta Creek splits in three. **Trailhead** 45.590438, -122.067482 **Drive time** 45 mins. **Info** bit.do/TripleFalls

DAYHIKE

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN, MT. HOOD NATIONAL FOREST

Every Portlander has a favorite view of the city's 11,239-foot backdrop, Mt. Hood. For our money, the best place to see Oregon's highest peak is from the top of Lookout Mountain, where you'll also see Mt. Rainier, the Three Sisters, the central Oregon desert, and the Columbia River. And the 9.6-mile out-and-back there is a stunner. From OR 35, switchback through a young forest to Gumjuwac Saddle and pick up the Divide Trail, which takes you from wet, west-facing forest to drier, eastern meadows. Continue up, with Mt. Hood your constant companion, to the old fire lookout spot at Lookout's 6,525-foot summit. Got more time? Take the 2.2-mile side loop to High Prairie, a flowery wonderland whose multi-colored show peaks in August with an explosion of daisies, lupine, arnica, and paintbrush.

Trailhead 45.332916, -121.549859 **Drive time** 2 hrs. **Info** fs.usda.gov/mthood



GEAR BAZAAR

Next Adventure, a gear shop on SE Grand at Stark, has a huge selection of the latest stuff and a bargain area in the basement. nextadventure.net

OVERNIGHT

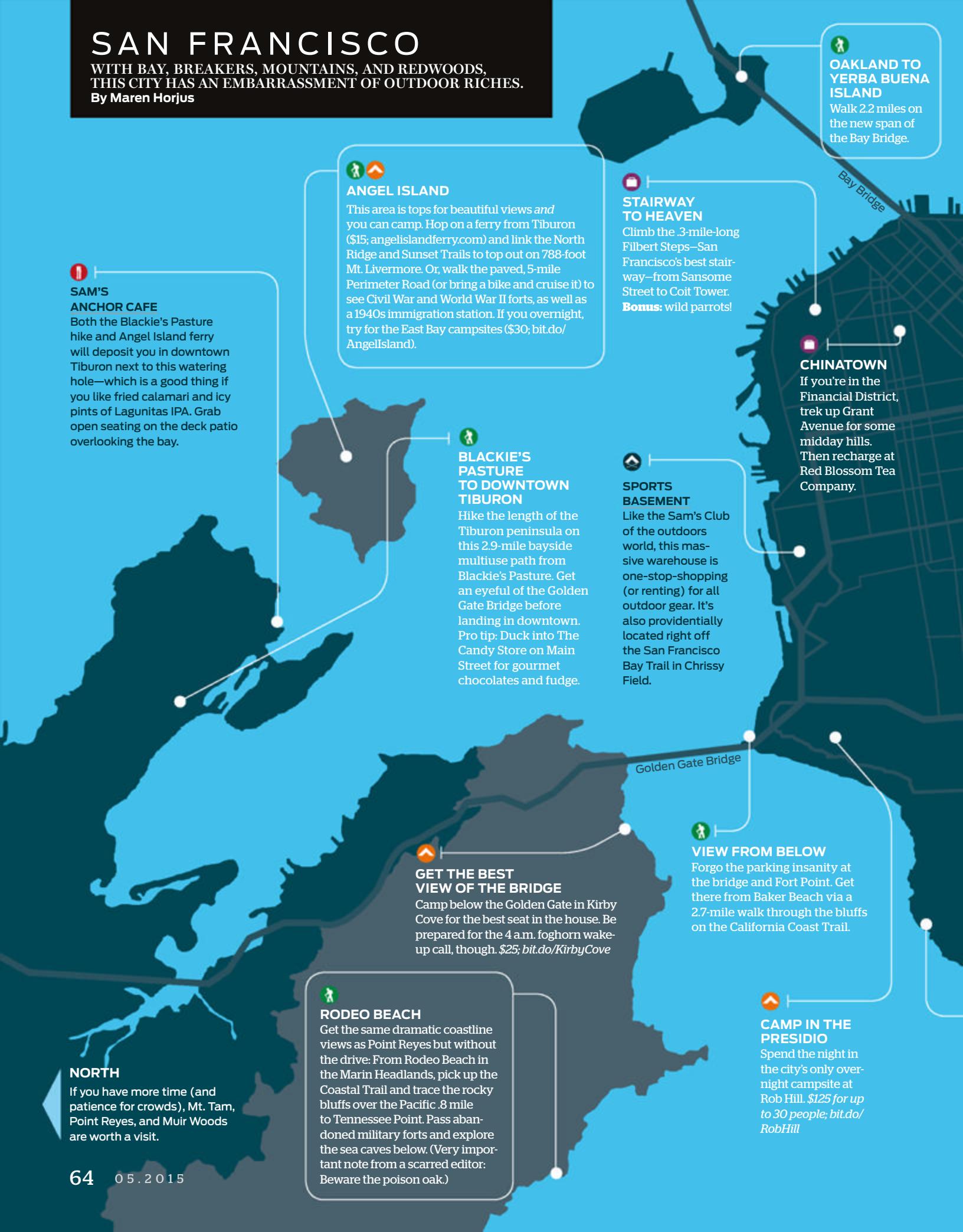
SERENE LAKE TRAIL, ROARING RIVER WILDERNESS

Six lakes and views of five Cascade volcanoes over 12.6 miles highlight all the best of the area in a single night. Take the Shellrock Lake Trail to Frazier Turnaround, then drop down to junctions for the three Rock Lakes. Upper is the prettiest and most peaceful stop for a rest, while Middle is the best for a quick dip, especially into deep holes from rocks along the shore. Continue on to Serene Lake (mile 5) and camp at the far end, past a shoreline boulder that's perched 10 feet above a deep, inviting pool. The next morning, pass Cache Meadow and close the loop back to Frazier. **Trailhead** 45.126987, -121.970387 **Drive time** 2 hrs. **Info** bit.do/Shellrock

SAN FRANCISCO

WITH BAY, BREAKERS, MOUNTAINS, AND REDWOODS, THIS CITY HAS AN EMBARRASSMENT OF OUTDOOR RICHES.

By Maren Horjus



EAST

The East Bay is a gem in itself. Mt. Diablo, Wildcat Peak, Tilden Regional Park, and Mission Peak are worth the trip over.

4505 BURGERS & BBQ

After you're done snapping pics of "Postcard Row" in Alamo Square Park, walk a block west—where the Best Damn Cheeseburger awaits.

MT. SUTRO

Foggy day? Watch the mist roll in through the eucalyptus trees on the Historic Trail.

MT. DAVIDSON

High point San Francisco on a 1-mile path to the 927-foot summit.

GOLDEN GATE PARK

You'll never get bored in this 1,017-acre urban park, but get a real taste of wilderness on Strawberry Hill. The disc golf course is also top-notch. Fore!

BERNAL HEIGHTS

It's less crowded than Twin Peaks and, in return for the short climb, you get one of the coolest views of downtown. From here, it looks like you're looking down rows of corn.

WEST

One more reason to like the Bay Area: nonstop to Hawaii. The Na Pali Coast is a great cure for summer fog.

LANDS END

Check out the Coastal Trail and the Sutro Baths—San Francisco's Machu Picchu—then head over to the Beach Chalet Brewery to refuel.

SOUTH

If you have a weekend, venture out to Big Basin Redwoods State Park, about 20 miles north of Santa Cruz.

SAN BRUNO MOUNTAIN

Bag a peak within city limits, but steer clear of the popular Ridge and Saddle Trails. Instead, opt for the 3.5-mile Summit Loop Trail, which climbs to the 1,314-foot peak. Spot Mt. Diablo and Candlestick Park from the top. Late-summer bonus: yellow tarweed, golden asters, and sticky monkey flowers.

MCLAREN PARK

Channel the city's bohemian legacy on the 2.7-mile Philosopher's Way hike, which features 14 "musing stations," and views that stretch from downtown to San Bruno.

SUNSET HEIGHTS

You don't need to leave the city for this one: Connect Hawk Hill, Golden Gate Heights, and Grand View Parks on this 1.1-mile urban hike that, on a clear day, earns you a vista over Golden Gate Park and the Bay into Marin. If it's too foggy in the Inner Sunset, all is not lost because you're still only a short walk from the best baklava (Golden Bear Trading Company) and focaccia (Arizmendi) in the city.

FORT FUNSTON

Explore the peninsula's largest dunefield.

SWEENEY RIDGE

Ascend the paved Sneath Lane Trail 2.8 miles to views over Pacifica and to San Andreas Lake. Peel off to check out the Nike missile site and the Discovery Site. The latter commemorates the first recorded European sighting of the bay in the 1700s.

MORI POINT

Find one of the Bay Area's—shhh!—last quiet (and clean) beaches here. If you can pull yourself away, hop on any number of short trails on this 110-acre coastal promontory, which protects garter snakes and California red-legged frogs.

KEY

AFTER WORK

DAYHIKE

OVERNIGHT

N

PHOENIX

AFTER WORK

TOM'S THUMB TRAIL, MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE

Unlike the Valley's more popular summit trails up Camelback Mountain and Piestewa Peak, hikers travel the 5.7 miles (round-trip) to Tom's Thumb for the crowd-free view as much as the workout. The route switchbacks 1,000 feet in 2 miles on a rocky staircase to the base of the 180-foot-tall granite plug. Backtrack .3 mile and hike another .8 mile to Lookout Point for a panorama of the McDowells Range and the Valley. Return the same way. **Trailhead** 33.694423, -111.801789 **Drive time** 50 mins. **Info** mcdowellsonoran.org

OVERNIGHT

HELLSGATE TRAIL, HELLSGATE WILDERNESS

Don't let the name scare you away. Sure, it can get scorching hot from June to August, but this 8-mile (one-way) out-and-back has a heavenly destination. Take the Hellsgate Trail (#37) through manzanita scrubland and across the exposed Apache Ridge to a steep, 2,000-foot descent in the last 2 miles to Tonto Creek Canyon. Set up camp at the confluence of Tonto and Haigler Creeks, on the sandy beach beneath giant sycamore trees. **Trailhead** 34.267378, -111.140378 **Drive time** 1 hr. 45 mins. **Info** fs.usda.gov/tonto



TOP OF TOM'S THUMB TRAIL



JOIN A TRAIL CLUB

The Arizona Trail Association is the nexus for local hikers and offers a mix of events, from organized trips to trail work and natural history lectures. aztrail.org

DAYHIKE

HAUNTED CANYON TRAIL, SUPERSTITION WILDERNESS

See the greener face of the Superstitions with a hike up Haunted Canyon Trail (#203), located on the wilderness area's east side. From the Haunted Canyon trailhead, it's a 6-mile (one way) ramble up-canyon along the gently flowing Pinto Creek to the historic Tony Ranch cabin and nearby spring (hence the greenery). Have lunch beneath an old cottonwood tree, then return on the creekside path, or hike west an extra 2 miles up steep switchbacks to Bull Basin saddle and savor a hawk's-eye view of the wilderness. **Trailhead** 33.423848, -111.007233 **Drive time** 1 hr. 45 mins. **Info** bit.do/HauntedCanyon

AUSTIN

AFTER WORK

BULL CREEK, BULL CREEK GREENBELT

No need to wait until the end of the day to hike in this urban oasis. Bull Creek is so centrally located and accessible from Loop 360, you can hit it on your lunch break. The 5.8-mile (one way) Greenbelt follows—and occasionally crosses—perennial Bull Creek as it cascades over smooth rock ledges and bends into moss-covered, limestone grottoes. If you wait until after work, bring a buddy: Bull Creek is one of the few parks in Austin where dogs can run around off-leash. **Trailhead** 30.378632, -97.778492 **Drive time** 20 mins. **Info** austinparks.org

DAYHIKE

TRAMMELL'S CROSSING, PEDERNALES FALLS STATE PARK

Dangle your feet in the cool waters of the Pedernales River after a hot hike and you'll understand why larger-than-life Texans like LBJ and Willie Nelson made homes in this part of the state. Take the 6.5-mile Trammell's Crossing loop trail from the "River Trail" sign at the park campground and cross the ankle-deep water (impassable after heavy rains). Climb north as you gain views of the river below, where Twin Falls tumble over limestone ledges. **Trailhead** 30.312274, -98.245432 **Drive time** 1 hr. **Info** tpwd.state.tx.us

LOS ANGELES

DAYHIKE

VITAL LINK TRAIL, WILDWOOD CANYON PARK

Skip the yoga-pant-wearing, sneaker-sporting, latte-sipping crowds on some of L.A.'s other dayhikes, and lace up your boots for this rocky, 5.8-mile round-tripper to an airy view. The trail climbs almost 2,000 feet on the Vital Link Trail to the crumbly ridge of the Verdugo Mountains. Bring a hat as there's almost no shade along the entire route. Follow the ridge southeast with near constant views over Burbank and downtown L.A.

Trailhead 34.202783, -118.298303
Drive time 30 mins. **Info** glen-

OVERNIGHT

THREE T'S TRAIL, CUCAMONGA WILDERNESS

The T's stand for the names of the three 8,000-plus-foot peaks you'll crest on this 13.5 miler. Follow ski trails up 8,587-foot Thunder Mountain, then a narrow crest trail to 8,985-foot Telegraph Peak. Camp on the flats southwest of the summit (bring water). Pop over Timber Mountain (8,303 feet) to Baldy Notch at mile 13.5, where you can grab the chairlift down if you're beat (mtbaldyskilifts.com).

Trailhead 34.266084, -117.626796
Drive time 1 hr. 15 mins. **Info** \$5 daily Adventure Pass; bit.do/ThreeTs

VERDUGO MOUNTAINS



OVERNIGHT

SKY ISLAND CIRCUIT, HILL COUNTRY STATE NATURAL AREA

As one of the largest and least-developed parks in the Texas State Parks system, the 5,369-acre Hill Country State Natural Area offers the same type of scrubby, endless views as Big Bend—except a heckuva lot closer. For a 10-mile loop, pack all of your water, and begin at Bar 0. Follow Trail 5A (take the .5-mile round-trip detour to check out Sky Island Overlook) to the junction with Trail 4. Follow 4B for 3 miles, hugging a 350-foot-tall limestone escarpment with Hill Country views. Reconnect with Trail 4 and take 4A to camp at Butterfly Springs backcountry campsite (mile 5.9). Close the loop by hiking east on Trails 3A, then 3, 2A, and 2. **Trailhead** 29.628001, -99.182242
Drive time 2 hrs. 15 mins. **Info** tpwd.state.tx.us

PASSING ON THE LEFT

THINK HIKING IS JUST FOR THE WOODS?
THIS NITTY-GRITTY CITY TREK WILL
CHANGE YOUR MIND. BY DAN KOEPPEL



I am not looking for peace and quiet. I'm seeking action, noise, light, and sound—especially sound: a wall of it. If I close my eyes, I might be able to imagine that this is the roar of the ocean, but I don't want to close my eyes. It is dusk, and the I-5 traffic is blowing past me on either side. It is the perfect time to be exactly here on this hike. The cars are inches away—on the other side of a barrier—and I'm thinking, when I have room for thought, that this is why I live in Los Angeles. This is a beautiful Los Angeles moment.

There are a few obvious ways urban hiking is different. You're in a city, usually on pavement, with better access to bathrooms and burritos (more on that in a sec). The wildlife you encounter tends to be of the human variety. But the biggest difference—the key difference—is less apparent. An in-town walk is an exercise in multiple choice. There's no one "right" path between the start and the finish. There's chaos in choice, but also freedom.

My highway-staircase-trail 10-mile hike begins just north of downtown at the Chinatown Metro Gold Line light rail station. I walk through Los Angeles State Historic Park, along the former Zanja Madre, or "Mother Ditch," heading toward the Los Angeles River, the concrete-lined channel famous for movie car chases and slated for a \$1 billion green makeover.

When the Arroyo Seco Parkway, the next segment, was constructed in 1939, a large chunk of Los Angeles' major north-south surface thoroughfare—Figueroa Street—and its sidewalks disappeared to make way. In its place, engineers created a half-mile long, caged walkway that includes ramps and spiral stairways that thread between the north and southbound lanes of the highway, and there I walk upstream against a violent river of motor vehicles.

The highway walkway ends in the Solano Canyon Neighborhood, one of the city's oldest Mexican-American communities. In the late 1950s, most of the canyon's residents were evicted, and Dodger Stadium was built. I find a cool—if heartbreaking—detour along Lilac Terrace to a remote parking area for the baseball field. The smooth black asphalt doesn't hint at what's below: homes and a church which had their roofs torn off and their interiors filled and paved over.

From here, the hike starts to feel more like a hike, following the Portola Trail with views of the distant San Gabriel Mountains through Elysian Park. This empties out into one of the city's oldest neighborhoods, Echo Park, a patchwork of hundred-year-old houses, steep streets, and more than 40 public stairways. I climb the zigzagging Baxter Street Stairs—at 231 steps, the city's second longest—and the Loma Vista Stairway (182 steps).

The walk ends a mile later near Sunset Boulevard, where I indulge in what is arguably the journey's greatest asset—a taco from the legendary Guisado's, an East Los Angeles tradition. I could work off the taco by walking 2 miles due east on Sunset Boulevard toward the start, but maybe I'll just grab the #2 bus. It's a city; there are no right answers. •

Trip Planner

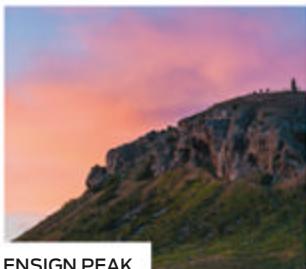
Trailhead 34.087418, -118.213373
Info bigparadela.com

SALT LAKE CITY

AFTER WORK

ENSIGN PEAK, ENSIGN PARK NATURE PARK

You could hit either Cottonwood Canyon for a quick fix, but this 1-miler offers a better view. Brigham Young was so taken with this local hill in 1847 that he named it himself. Go for sunset. **Trailhead** 40.791679, -111.888263 **Drive time** 10 mins. **Info** bit.do/EnsignPeak



ENSIGN PEAK

DAYHIKE

LOWE PEAK LOOP, OQUIRRH MOUNTAINS

Sunrise more your thing? Check it out from Lowe Peak, the first stop (mile 2.8) in this three-peak, 12-mile loop topping out at 10,589 feet. You'll cross dozens of streams in Ophir Canyon and touch the tops of Lowe, Rocky, and Peak 9530 with views of the Wasatch Range rising behind the city. **Trailhead** 40.400609, -112.229672 **Drive time** 1 hr. 10 mins. **Info** bit.do/LowePeak

OVERNIGHT

HIGH UNTA LAKES, HIGH UNTA WILDERNESS

Visit nine alpine lakes in a meandering, 13-mile high-country out-and-back. From the Crystal Lake trailhead outside of Kamas take the Smith Morehouse Trail to the lake basin. Weir, Duck, Island, and Marjorie Lakes have good jump-in spots and camping. **Trailhead** 40.681783, -110.963275 **Drive time** 1 hr. 30 mins. **Info** 3-day Rec. Pass, \$6; bit.do/Uintas

CAMPING AT GORE LAKE



DENVER

AFTER WORK

INNER CANYON TRAIL, CASTLEWOOD CANYON S.P.

Even though the outdoorsy residents of Denver frequent Castlewood, it's still easy to find solitude in this 2,303-acre preserve where 13 miles of trails crisscross the prairie, shady forest, and canyon bottoms. Check out the Inner Canyon Trail, a 1.1-mile (one way) journey that descends 200 feet to the floor and passes through the pines of the Black Forest. **Trailhead** 39.333567, -104.744232 **Drive time** 50 mins. **Info** bit.do/castlewood

DAYHIKE

CENTENNIAL CONE, CENTENNIAL CONE PARK

When Denverites want to show off our city's wild borders, the 12-mile loop around this extinct volcano is our go-to for quick-access views. Head out from the Mayhem Gulch trailhead and switchback 1,500 feet in 1.5 miles from the floor of Clear Creek Canyon. Turn right (east) onto the Travois Trail and begin the loop. Let the vanilla-scented forest envelop you, then cross bare rocks with views of the 9,000 footers nearby. Close the loop along the Elk Range Trail, where Thirteeners rake the western horizon. **Trailhead** 39.737191, -105.371633 **Drive time** 40 mins. **Info** bit.do/CentCone



CHEAP, GOOD GEAR

Denver probably has more outdoors equipment per capita than any other major city. Find it used at the Wilderness Exchange on 15th Street. wilderness-exchangelimited.com

OVERNIGHT

ECCLES PASS, EAGLES NEST WILDERNESS

As any Front Range hiker knows, standard routes up the nearby Fourteeners are so busy with all manner of peakbaggers on summer weekends that you'll find more solitude at a Broncos game. But not many Front Range hikers know about the Gore Range Thirteeners. You will have to tackle I-70, but the range is deep and empty, and this 12.4-miler gets the goods. From the Meadow Creek trailhead in Frisco, climb through 3 miles of aspen groves to treeline, where alpine meadows unravel before a cirque of 12,000-footers (Deming and Buffalo Mountains, Red and Eccles Peaks). Camp between Eccles and Red Buffalo Passes to bag them, or take the 1.4-mile spur to Gore Lake (mile 8), a secluded alpine stunner. Continue following Gore Creek to finish at Deluge Lake trailhead in Vail. **Trailhead** 39.588823, -106.106129 **Drive time** 1 hr. 15 mins. **Info** bit.do/Eccles



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Ideas Wanted.

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CHICAGO

AFTER WORK

SAG VALLEY TRAIL, MCCLAUGHRY SPRINGS WOODS

Burn off workday stress on a short-but-serious, 2.8-mile hike through two Chicagoland woods. From the Kean Avenue lot (southwest of the city), follow an unmarked dirt path northwest and join the Sag Valley Trail heading west. Scale the steep path 100 vertical feet to the top of a ridge, and after .5 mile, turn right (following purple arrows) at the T intersection. Drop to a sparkling stream where bullfrogs and dragonflies sun themselves in summer. Cross Kean Avenue and ramble through Palos Park Woods to loop back to the trailhead. **Trailhead** 41.677255, -87.844512 **Drive time** 30 mins. **Info** fpdcc.com

DAYHIKE

FALLS LOOP, WATERFALL GLEN FOREST PRESERVE

Taking the 9.7-mile loop around Waterfall Glen seems to yield a greater diversity of terrain, plants, and animals than a day at the Field Museum. From the trailhead at Cass Avenue, hike counterclockwise to save the best forest vistas for the end. After 6 miles, you'll come to a small waterfall constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Continue around Argonne National Laboratory, catching glimpses of the oldest oak and walnut trees in DuPage County. **Trailhead** 41.724817, -87.973891 **Drive time** 30 mins. **Info** dupageforest.com

BLURRING BOUNDARIES

FIND THE WILD NEAR THE CITY WITH AN OVER-NIGHT PADDLE TO CASTLE ROCK STATE PARK.

BY CINDY CROSBY



In the shadow of the Rock River's sunset-colored, 120-foot sandstone cliffs, swallows dive for insects and a bald eagle eyes me from high in a tree snag. My kayak glides silently along. I've come to this place to escape from the tyranny of the urgent: client calls, constant emails, and a too-long to-do list.

I need solitude in the city.

I left the suburbs late this morning, and now, in the early afternoon, I'm floating 1.5 miles downstream to my paddle-in, primitive campsite. A red-bellied woodpecker drums staccato overhead. I feared cars on the nearby highway would be intrusive, but they add a rhythm of their own.

I slip back into my kayak, aiming for the opposite shore, where timbered steps lead to 22 miles of trails at Lowden-Miller State Forest, a mosaic of sunlit fields and dense, shady woods. The scent in the air inside shifts from river to pine. When I reach the open fields, bright-colored butterflies flit along the trail.

I paddle back to camp, delighted that it's still empty. The sun sets and the stars appear. The river's lullaby mixes with the highway's hum. I'm asleep in an instant.

Trip Planner

Put-in 41.974368, -89.366232 **Permits** None; Canoe Camp Area is first-come, first-serve. **Shuttle/rental** TJ's Canoe Rental, Oregon, IL; \$60/overnight; tjscanoerental.com **Info** dnr.state.il.us

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ORLANDO

AFTER WORK

RED AND YELLOW BLAZE LOOP, ECONLOCKHATCHEE SANDHILLS CONSERVATION AREA

Disney wishes it had something like this flower-dappled vale. The 3.2-mile lollipop-loop tours the 706-acre conservation area, busting with blazing star and yellow aster in early to late fall. Large oak hammocks, saw palmetto, pine flat woods, and grand cypresses abound. Check with rangers about seasonal flooding before you go. **Trailhead** 28.587639, -81.155889 **Drive time** 20 mins. **Info** floridahikes.com

DAYHIKE

WHITE LOOP, TOSOHATCHEE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Florida can feel relentlessly new in a lot of places. Come here to see what the state *used* to look like. This 12-mile lollipop loop off the Florida Trail takes you under ancient live oaks into the state's oldest slash pine forests, where the high canopy encloses a sparsely vegetated ground. Follow the FT's orange blazes south into a forest fringed with wild iris to the White Loop. Travel north to the Yellow Loop and follow it back to the junction with the FT and then your car. **Trailhead** 28.498500, 80.996750 **Drive time** 30 mins. **Info** myfwc.com

TOSOHATCHEE WILDLIFE AREA



OVERNIGHT

FLORIDA TRAIL, BULL CREEK WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Narrow trail bridges, pine savannas, and open plains dominate this 13.8-mile loop on the Florida Trail. Start at the Levee 73 gate off FL 192 East and hike south to cross Crabgrass Creek on a footbridge. Scan the shoreline for carnivorous pitcher plants. Keep heading south, following the abandoned Union Cypress Railroad along Bull Creek to Little Spruce campground (mile 7.4). Next day, follow white blazes west then north for 6.4 miles before rejoining the Florida Trail at Cemetery Road. **Trailhead** 28.116389, -80.932889 **Drive time** 55 mins. **Info** floridahikes.com

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*Learning
the alphabet:
After the AT,
Christian
Thomas
headed to
the PCT, and
the CDT is
next. Here,
he's with his
mom, Andrea,
and her
boyfriend,
Dion, during
their last
month on
the PCT.*





Kindergarten Can Wait

When five-year-old Christian Thomas set out with his family to thru-hike the Appalachian Trail, some skeptics said he couldn't—and shouldn't. But like a lot of kids, he wasn't listening.

By Bill Donahue | Photography by Brown W. Cannon III

WE SWOOP AROUND ANOTHER TURN IN THE MOUNTAINS. THE ROAD GETS A BIT STEEPER, AND IN THE JANUARY RAIN, A GRAY TENDRIL OF MIST DRIFTS OVER THE GREEN WOODS. THE ENGINE CHURNS AS OUR CAR LABORS UPHILL. BESIDE ME, THE LITTLE BOY IN A CAR SEAT STARES OUT THE WINDOW. CHRISTIAN THOMAS IS FIVE YEARS OLD AND REED-THIN WITH ROSY, CHERUBIC CHEEKS, AND BY NOW HE HAS EATEN ABOUT HALF OF THE CHOCOLATE DONUT HOLES CONTAINED IN THE 14-OUNCE WALMART BOX IN HIS LAP. WHAT'S ON HIS MIND? IS HE DREADING THE HIKE PLANNED FOR TODAY? PLENTY OF ADULTS WOULD BE ANXIOUS ABOUT A 15-MILE TREK IN A CHILLY DOWNPOUR, HOOFING IT UP AND DOWN ON THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL AS IT ROLLS THROUGH SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK. OR IS HE JUST MESMERIZED BY THE FAT RAINDROPS LASHING AT THE WINDOWS?

Quiet, quiet, quiet. There are crinkled paper bags wadded on the floor of the car, a thrashed 1996 Jeep Cherokee, and dirty laundry is strewn everywhere. Yet somehow amid the chaos, this kid is tranquil, composed—put together. His brown hair is neatly parted. His manner is genial, and when he speaks he exudes the incongruous panache of a TV reporter delivering the news from outside a low-rent apartment complex. “I like fog,” he says in a high, fluty voice. “It’s cool! When you see a person, it’s like, wow, he magicked here.”

Christian giggles, charmed by his own wit. Then he keeps eating donut holes and his mother turns around to peer back at him. Andrea Rego is 26, with long brunette pigtails. In her most recent job, she did office work at a construction company on Long Island. She can be feisty. Like a moment ago, frustrated, she said, “I’m gonna burn this car when this trip is done!” Now, in a sweet baby voice, she tells her son, “You can have as many of those as you want, bud. Eat up.” She turns to me and adds, “I’d be happy if he ate the whole box. He needs the calories.”

Maybe he does. It’s early 2014 and Christian is hiking the entire Appalachian Trail, all 2,180 miles, with his mom and stepdad (well, technically his mom’s boyfriend), Dion Pagonis, 29. Christian—now best known by his trail name, Buddy Backpacker—started eight months ago, in Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia, and he’s trudged through snow in North Carolina and black flies in Maine. He’s slept with his Pooh Bear every night and he’s out-hiked his mom. She stopped after just 400 miles, electing to chauffeur, which improved their resupply logistics and

enabled Buddy and Dion to walk without heavy packs. In a week, after hiking numerous trail sections out of sequence, the trio will return to Harper’s Ferry. Christian will become the youngest person in history to complete the AT. After that, the family plans to hike the Pacific Crest Trail (2,650 miles) and the Continental Divide Trail (3,100 miles).

At the moment, Christian weighs just 46 pounds. So he keeps eating donut holes, and then, after a while, he groans. “I don’t feel too good, Mommy,” he says. “My stomach hurts.”

“You’ll feel better when you start

hiking, Bud,” Andrea says, again in the baby voice. “You always do.” Dion says nothing. Almost always, Dion is silent.

We park at the trailhead, and when we climb out of the car the wind is ripping. When Andrea pulls a transparent rain poncho over Christian’s jacket, it rattles in the gale. No other hikers are out. There are hardly any cars in the whole park, and it’s still pouring. Being a parent myself, I think, “Now’s when it happens. Now is when the kid throws a tantrum in protest.”

But Christian is placid. His bellyache is gone or forgotten, and he’s skipping around in the parking lot and enlisting me as a straight man for his pranks. (I’m still a novelty, having just arrived to hike with him for three days.) “Knock knock,” he says.

“Who’s there?”

“Car go.”

“Car go who?”

“Car go beep beep.” He throws his head back and laughs, so the parking lot fills for a moment with bright peals of joy.

“How many miles can you hike in a day?” he asks me as we start hiking.

“I don’t know. About 20.”

“That’s nothing! I did 22 miles one day and I wasn’t even tired.”



HOW FAR IS TOO FAR? How much toil and suffering should a kid take—and what for? A generation ago, back when children roamed the streets freely, pedaling their banana seat bikes in a time before helmets, no one fretted over such questions. When a six-year-old boy named Michael Cogswell thru-hiked the entire Appalachian Trail with his parents in 1980, there was nothing but feel-good rhetoric surrounding his hike. Newspapers made light of how the little boy crashed constantly, weighted by his pack, and this magazine ran a celebratory story in which the author, Michael’s stepdad Jeffrey Cogswell, waxed poetic about the trailside flora—“red trillium, violets, purple ironweed”—and lionized the little boy’s perseverance as a photo showed a wonderstruck Michael drinking from an ice-skinned mountain creek.

Now, though, childrearing is a science, and sniping at other people’s parenting techniques may be our favorite contact sport. When journalist Lenore Skenazy decided in 2008 to let her nine-year-old son ride the New York subway alone, she received thousands of hate letters and was called “America’s Worst Mom.” (Her response: freerangekids.com.) Similar skepticism has surrounded two Texas sisters who run half-marathons. When *The New York Times* profiled Kaytlynn Welsch, 12, and Heather Welsch, 10, in 2012, the headline asked, “Too Fast Too Soon?” One reader responded, “This is child abuse.”

Any parent who loves the outdoors can find him- or herself pushing the envelope, sometimes unwittingly. I will confess that when my own daughter, now 20, was in preschool, I took her on a kayak trip during which our inflatable boat sprung a leak. Our tent and sleeping bags slipped out into the rapids and I spent a frigid, sleepless night



Christian (opposite) takes a well-earned play break on the PCT in Oregon.





chastising myself for being selfish and negligent. But that was just a weekend. To thru-hike the AT, Christian has had to climb over rocks and roots almost every day for nine months, overcoming challenges that defeat plenty of adults, even as his young sinew and bones are still growing. Naturally, his parents have critics. In one recent post on a Facebook page, a hiker named Yvonne called Andrea out. "If BB's mother is still on here and viewing these posts, I want to challenge you!" she wrote. "I challenge you to take a moment, step back and ask yourself who this Appalachian Trail hike adventure and experience is all about... if it truly is about Buddy... allow him to explore, allow him stop and love the mountain views."

An AT stalwart calling himself GreyWolf took a harder line, alleging that Dion and Andrea brought Buddy hiking in unsafe conditions. "The temperature never got above the 20s and was in the teens at night. Should I call social services?" he railed.

But the family's Facebook pictures from Christian's journey on the AT voice a strong rejoinder to skeptics. Here's the boy standing atop Katahdin, his arms raised in triumph. Here he is catching snowflakes on his tongue on Christmas Eve in the Smokies. As I scroll through the images, I can't help but marvel at how Christian has experienced so much delight at such a young age. And part of me wonders: Should we really be asking if Andrea Rego is a bad mom for setting



For the PCT, Andrea gave up her role driving a support vehicle and the family hiked together.

her son on such an arduous task? Is the correct question, in fact, *Is she the best mother ever?*



CERTAINLY, SHE STARTED from a rough spot.

When Andrea got pregnant with Christian in 2008, she was in her second year of college at Stony Brook University, in New York. She was 20 years old, overweight, and ensconced in a nine-month romance with a man from whom she is now estranged.

"I hoped Christian would bring some stability to my life," she says. The plan failed. After the birth, Andrea continued attending college for a year, but then quit



to work full time. Logging 50 to 60 hours a week at the construction company, Andrea, who is 5'4", ballooned to 200 pounds. "By the time I picked Christian up at daycare," she says, "I was so tired that we just went to McDonald's or ate frozen food in front of the television. Christian wouldn't eat anything if it wasn't in a package. He was addicted to TV."

Soon, though, Andrea grew closer to her friend Dion Pagonis, who had his own unfulfilling (but lucrative) job on Long Island, working in a windowless room at Sherman Specialty, the world's largest supplier of restaurant crayons. Dion, who is also 5'4", once weighed well over 250 pounds. But he is not one to live in quiet desperation forever. He's ambitious, in idiosyncratic ways. In high school, he

earned his Eagle Scout badge supervising a team that re-created a Native American village. In college, at SUNY Fredonia, he was the president of Greek life.

In 2007, Dion bought a Wii Fit and began working out three hours a day. He lost 70 pounds. Not long after, Andrea joined a gym and began working out, too. By 2011, Dion was fit enough to try the AT solo. (He made it 200 miles before twisting his ankle.) Later, he convinced Andrea to join him for a backpacking trip in Colorado. She had never before gone on an overnight hike, and she was still smoking a pack a day. Over a weekend, they covered only 7 miles. "It was very hard," she says, "but I loved it—just being outside, away from Long Island."

In spring 2012, finally, Dion engineered an escape plan. He and Andrea sold nearly all their possessions and moved west to Colorado, first to Boulder, then to Crested Butte, a ski town where Dion scored design gigs at elance.com and they operated a hostel called Butte Bunk. While Dion snowboarded, Christian (then four) and Andrea took to the bunny hill on skis. "By the end of the season," Andrea writes at buddybackpacker.com, Christian "was blowing down moguls and double blacks on one of the hardest mountains in the United States. He has the endurance of an advanced athlete with a deep love for nature. Andrea and Dion have no choice but to live epic lives with him."

The experience in Crested Butte changed the trajectory of their lives. Suddenly, the pair hoped to bring Buddy to California, so they could all learn to surf. They thought they'd like try a long-distance mountain bike odyssey somewhere. They wanted to put themselves on a path toward adventure, and test their own endurance as well as Christians. In Colorado, as the snow melted, Andrea envisioned another kind of adventure. "Why don't we hike the Appalachian Trail?" she asked Dion in April of 2013. Crested Butte was about to button up for the off-season. So they bought the well-used Jeep for \$1,500, loaded their gear, and headed east.

• • •

IT'S VERY SLOW HIKING with Dion and Christian, and also a little bit solemn. Both of them walk with iPods and headphones. Dion listens to rock, Christian to educational music and lessons—brainy stuff chosen by Dion. (The digital lessons are the backbone of Christian's home-schooling program.) All I can hear, moving along through the woods, is the dull thud of footfalls and the rain pattering on the dead, sodden leaves. We roll along over gentle hills, passing rocky outcroppings that open onto the gray horizon, and eventually (inspired by his music, it seems) Christian begins skipping and weaving on the trail.

"Pay attention," Dion tells him. "Look

where you're going."

"I love the Octopus's Garden song," Christian says when it comes on his iPod.

"Please don't sing it," says Dion. Then he adds, "Take your hands out of your pockets. Christian! Listen to instructions!"

In downtime at occasional hotels, Dion and Christian cuddle up together and watch movies on Andrea's iPad. Out on the trail, though, the dialogue is nearly all safety-oriented during the 40 miles I hike with them. To me, Dion explains, "If he trips and breaks an arm, our hike is over." In New Hampshire, Dion made Christian a promise: "If you don't have any boo-boos when we get to Katahdin, I'll give you some money." Christian lost that challenge, scraping his knee in a crash.

Now, though, it's Dion who's holding us back. Still a bit chunky at 180 pounds, he isn't a particularly fast hiker, and he's plagued with what he calls "Fred Flintstone feet"—his arches are almost convex. At times, Christian and I drift ahead. Then, I ask Christian about his audio lessons. He's learning vocabulary words: nefarious, subvert, fetid, and encumbered.

"What's the teacher saying right now?"

He squints a moment, listening. Then he parrots the saccharine voice from his iPod: "We're so encumbered with red tape we can't get any real work done."

When we meet Andrea at a road crossing, Christian runs toward her, laughing, to hug her. We all get a moment of sweet reprieve, but only a moment. Andrea says, "I always feel like we're a pit crew in a car race. It's like, 'You tie his shoes. I'll put food in his mouth.' We're always rushing to get him back on the trail." She turns to Christian. "Are you ready for some Pringles, Bud?" Looking back at me, she says, "He loves Pringles—that's his favorite food."

Christian takes a small stack, and then as we step into the woods, I glance back at our mission vehicle: The Jeep is a dull red, with "buddybackpacker.com" and a big pair of angel wings, in yellow, that Dion drew on the hood. (The wings signify trail angels, as Andrea often gives other hikers rides.) The Jeep has 150,000 miles on it, but they've been hard miles; it looks like it might die on the next hill.

• • •

THE BUDDY BACKPACKER expedition is not a well-oiled machine, and by the time I joined, there'd been a medley of calamities. On the first night of the trip, after the family rolled out of Crested Butte, Andrea left her wallet at a convenience store. As Dion dislikes carrying money, the trio was broke. They made camp after midnight near Manhattan, Kansas, in a cold wind, and struggled setting up their tent for the first time. "I was shivering," Dion remembers.

"After just two restless hours, the family

pressed east, toward West Virginia and the start of their hike—and the start of their controversial trail strategies. Many hikers have attacked Andrea and Dion for being loosey-goosey—and also lazy—on the AT. Sometimes when faced with a big hill, they make things easy on themselves. They drove to the top of Mt. Washington twice, for instance, so Christian could hike down each side. (He never actually *climbed* Washington.) When it was snowing in the Smokies, they skipped ahead, down to Georgia, then came back weeks later. They took about 90 days off, in total, enabling Dion to earn much-needed money by doing design projects. They were simply hiking their own hike, to invoke the credo that pervades AT culture, but that counted little with backpacking's grand poohbahs, who in many cases have built their lives around the AT and come to style themselves the keepers of the trail's sacred mores.

"They were sloppy," says Warren Doyle, a retired college professor who's hiked the AT a record 16 times. "They did a lot of lollygagging, and they got into trouble because of that. They were out hiking far later into the winter than they needed to be." (Doyle, ironically, has critics himself. On his Appalachian Trail Expeditions, a support vehicle carts gear for hikers, enabling them to sashay nearly all 2,000-plus miles bearing nothing but daypacks.)

Other critics questioned if they were actually on the trail at all, suggesting that Christian's parents cheated by skipping several stretches of the AT, even as they pretend-logged the miles online.

"There are some people who are lying about thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail and, since it's almost Christmas, I'm not going to name them yet," wrote a man named Tom Bazemore on Facebook. "This will give them a chance to come clean and end their con game." Bazemore, who runs a Georgia-based shuttle company, continued by directly addressing his targets: "You are certainly not the first to lie about hiking the entire trail but the fact that you are using a little child in this con is truly beyond belief!"

Seventy-one comments followed, most of them nasty, and Andrea snarled back: "I hope you all are completely ashamed of yourselves for spewing such nonsense. I can't wait until we are finished and can laugh looking back at all you haters."

I called Bazemore to ask which sections Buddy and his folks had skipped. His complaints zeroed in on a 30.3-mile stretch of trail between Newfound Gap, North Carolina, and Davenport Gap, Tennessee. "I shuttled some hikers there exactly when [Christian and Dion] were supposed to be there," he said, "and I told these people to look for a man with a five-year-old boy. They never saw them."

Dion had anticipated such critiques,



however. In his own Facebook post, he wrote, "If I wasn't hiking with Buddy, I would be skeptical of his accomplishment, too." So along the length of the AT, he took photographs with a GPS camera and then posted them to a map at panaramio.com. His pictures are mostly of Christian standing at overlooks or streams, or by trees or on mountain-tops, and they do not skip the section Bazemore questions. For those 30 miles, there are more than 20 photos, each one time-stamped. I scrutinized them one morning, and a story emerged of a small boy moving over rocky terrain, through ice and snow, at a little more than 1.5 miles an hour. There is little doubt that Buddy Backpacker progressed steadily northeast, toward Davenport Gap, in two



*Christian
hams it up
with Dion.*

long days, on December 1 and 2, 2013.

I called Bazemore back and asked him to point me toward other skipped sections. "Look," he said, "I'm not going to go back and forth with you on this like we're all in junior high school. I know what I know and I stand by it."

• • •

THE WEATHER CLEARS, and when we begin hiking on the second day, after camping, Christian is in high spirits. "Isn't it beautiful out today?" he says. "The trail is nice and soft, and there are no roots, and it's pretty flat right here. It's even pretty warm." He's chatty now, and he speaks of seeing orange lizards on his AT odyssey, and turkeys, and red flying



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squirrels, and a rattlesnake, some wild ponies, and a moose. He doesn't know the names of the plants around us. He's experiencing nature as a small animal does, sensually, as a breeze on his back and a cold bite on his brow. Listening to him, I think of Michael Cogswell, the six-year-old thru hiker, now in his early 40s, who recently told me, "I wouldn't trade my AT experience for the world. There's a certain purity in doing something like that as a child. You can never get that back. But there are positives and negatives. By the time I was done with that hike, I wasn't really a kid anymore. I'd walked so many miles. I'd carried my own clothes and a tent and helped wash the laundry at night. I'd had all this responsibility."

Is Christian growing up too fast? He sure doesn't seem world-weary, for he keeps begging me to tell him make-believe stories. I tell him one, finally. It's about my plastic water bottle going "home," to China. The water bottle has a hard-to-pronounce fake Chinese name that Christian loves repeating, his voice a high-pitched array of scratchy, whispery sounds. When the tale is done, he spends 30 minutes detailing the plot of the film *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs*. Then he asks, "Should I tell you about *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs 2?*"

Is he lonely—starved for attention from people besides his parents? Probably a little, but when I ask if he misses going to school, he isn't entirely clear what school entails. Andrea says he enjoyed preschool on Long Island, but on the trail he only conjures up one memory. "They put me in with the babies," he says with disdain.

I ask him if hiking ever gets boring. "That's a silly question," he says. "No!"

"Do you ever hate the AT?"

"Sometimes I don't like it when it's really hard. Then I just want to be done. I want Mommy to be right there in the middle of the woods and I just want to go to sleep right there."

Later, I described my hike with Christian to Dr. W. Douglas B. Hiller, an orthopedic surgeon at North Hawaii Community Hospital and a one-time chief medical officer for the triathlon at the Olympics. He said, "I doubt they caused him any physical harm. As long as it was a happy family hike and he wasn't being pushed, or made to keep going when he was limping, he should be fine. If he got some bruises and cuts, well, that's what little kids do all day long—they run around and jump and fall and get up."

I searched at length for a child psychologist who might object to Hiller's sanguine take. I couldn't find one, and I decided that the hubbub over Andrea's parenting was rooted partly in fear: Andrea is different than most AT hikers. She's from working class Long Island. She's combative at times. Yes, she and Dion brought Christian hiking on a very cold day. But what's the harm in dressing

warmly and hitting the trail? Yes, Dion sometimes carps at the kid. As do many parents who steer their children toward more culturally accepted goals—piano, soccer, spelling bees. Why should hiking be any different? In fact, it's easy to see the experience in a very different light. Christian and his family are hiking America's most beloved and fought-over trail in pursuit of happiness, and they're happy most of the time. Together, they've found a way to engage with the world—to commune with its beauty and have an adventure. This is what matters.

On the last day I'm on the AT, Andrea picks us up at dusk, to drive us to the nearest shelter, where we'll camp. It's cold outside, so we savor the warm blast of the car's heater. When we park, Dion limps down the short path to the shelter. Christian leaps over the puddles. Andrea cooks us all dinner. Then the next morning, backing out, she runs over the gas stove. Under her breath, she says, "Shit!" Then she laughs and throws the stove into the Jeep and drives on.

• • •

I SEE THEM ONLY ONE MORE TIME, eight months later, on a rainy afternoon last September in the small town of Trout Lake, Washington, as they take a break near the end of their Pacific Crest Trail thru-hike. Trout Lake is a forested Nowheresville, and after 11 straight days on the trail they're ensconced in drab tasks—laundry, email, cleaning out their packs. Still, as I pull up to the Trout Lake Grocery to find Andrea standing there on the porch, with Christian entwined in her arms, she exudes a certain glow. There's an ease about her, a softness to her skin. She's happy—you can tell that without even asking questions. And she's sunbaked and lean now, 35 pounds lighter than when I'd last seen her. She's been hiking the whole way this time, with both her and Dion carrying packs. The Jeep is long gone.

"We did 23 miles yesterday before four o'clock," she says, looking down. "Didn't we, Buddy?"

"Yeah," Christian says, rocking a bit in his mother's arms. He's sleepy-eyed and determined, it seems, not to take the bait. "Actually," he says, "it was 22.8."

"What's been your favorite part of the PCT so far?" I ask.

"Whitney," he says. "It was cool. We were way up there. It felt like the end of the trail." There's still a kid's wonder in his voice, but it's more contained now. He's 2 or 3 inches taller, and there is, suddenly, a grace about his small, lanky person. It seems almost certain that in a few years girls will go crazy for him and that he'll deflect their ardor with a languid ease.

"And what else was fun?" I ask, digging a little more.

"Goat Rocks," he says, referring to a nearby boulder field that stretches on



YOUTH MOVEMENT

These kids are going places.



Youngest to Complete the Triple Crown

Only about 200 people have hiked all three of America's long trails—the Appalachian, Pacific Crest, and Continental Divide Trails—making the Triple Crown one of the rarest feats in the outdoors. By comparison, more than twice that number reach the top of Mt. Everest most years. And when Reed "Sunshine" Gionnes of Salem, Oregon, finished the CDT in 2013, at age 13, she became the youngest to join the elite club by an astounding 11 years. But her record may not last. If Christian completes the CDT this year, he'll become a Triple Crowner at age 7.



Youngest to Hike the AT Solo

Most adults struggle with the physical and mental hardships of a solo thru-hike: no one with whom to share the load; loneliness during months of hiking; making every decision alone. Neva "Chipmunk" Warren conquered these challenges and all the other difficulties of a thru-hike at age 15. She completed the Appalachian Trail in 2013, with zero long-distance hiking experience. "As I was climbing Springer Mountain on day one ... It was a lot harder than I thought it was going to be, and I was a bit scared," she told *Blue Ridge Outdoors*. But unlike a lot of older hikers faced with the same fears, she persevered.



Youngest to Hike Colorado's 14ers

Axel Hamilton conquered the 54 designated Colorado 14ers (as well as the four disputed peaks) by age 6. Hamilton completed the summits with his father and older brother, Calvin (who climbed the 14ers by age 8 and finished them all a second time last summer, at 10). Axel celebrated his final peak, Mt. Evans, on September 24, 2013, with a chocolate cake topped with 58 candles. What's next? Axel has his eyes on Colorado's 704 peaks over 13,000 feet.

—Ali Herman



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for a couple miles. "I like doing hard stuff. And this house," he says, meaning the store, where they're staying in an upstairs motel room. "At night, they light up these lights on the porch and it's beautiful. It looks like Christmas."

When Dion emerges, fresh from a shower, I see he's lost weight as well. He's more than 30 pounds lighter and also ebullient, almost jolly. The tenseness I'd seen before on the AT, as he tried to corral a restless kid and negotiate complex car logistics, has vanished. This time, the three of them have all hiked together. There is, it seems, a new calm in Dion's muscles. "This trail is easier than the AT," he says. "It's well-maintained, it's graded. It's not rocky and you can actually get a good stride going."

We walk across the street to get lunch, and Andrea and Dion update me some. Christian, they say, now likes to wield his bamboo hiking poles like Ninja swords. They've landed a host of sponsors—a tent sponsor, a pack sponsor, even a socks sponsor—and at one point, resting from the trail, they encountered a lovely 18-year-old girl who spent the afternoon teaching Christian how to



Christian
is 4 feet tall
(without
rocks).

twirl a hula hoop.

"You liked that didn't you, Bud?" Andrea asks.

"Yeah," he says, looking down at his fries. "That was good."

What jumps out is how steady they all seem. They're no longer the hapless outsiders of the backpacking world. No one is savaging them on Facebook anymore, and their goal of completing the Triple Crown in 2015 no longer seems outlandish. Barring catastrophe, they will get the job done. Then they'll move on to surfing or mountain biking or whatever. Everything will work out for Christian, more or less; he'll clearly be okay.

But to Christian, the unlikely peace that his family enjoys wandering the world is old news. He doesn't want to sit there and talk about it. There's a trampoline behind the store, and he keeps looking out the window toward it. Eventually, Andrea lets him go. He runs over to it, loose-limbed, his body lit with delight. He climbs inside the trampoline's protective black mesh fence, and begins jumping, giddy and laughing as he sails into the sky. ■



VIDEO
Christian
talks about his
plan to hike the
CDT in a video at
[backpacker.com/
buddy](http://backpacker.com/buddy).

Editor's note: Christian, Andrea, and Dion started their CDT thru-hike in March. Check for updates at buddybackpacker.com.

Bill Donahue has written for The Atlantic and The New York Times Magazine. With his daughter, he recently swam between remote Caribbean islands, and lived to tell the tale.

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You wouldn't store silverware in the bathroom, would you? Clear all non-gear out of your gear-designated space.

No garage or gear closet? Separate your gear and pack it in shallow bins that will slide under the bed.

THE UPGRADE **GEAR STORAGE**

Say goodbye to the days of I-know-it's-in-here-somewhere, of unidentifiable odors, of teetering piles. Because less mess equals more hiking.

BY MAREN HORJUS

PHOTOS BY ANDREW BYDLON

Man's best friend invited, too? Create a pup go-bag that you can grab easily. We like the Mountainsmith K9 Cube, which has designated pockets for food, collapsible bowls (included), and bedding (\$65; mountainsmith.com).



Keep a weekend's supply of dehydrated food on hand so you can hit the trail without stopping at the market.

Hang your most-used items—like daypacks and hydration reservoirs—on a pegboard (also makes a good drying rack).



Replace used items, like first-aid supplies, fuel, and batteries, after each trip so you're ready to go for the next one.

Store sleeping bags in large sacks, which preserves loft (always air dry thoroughly before storing); keep their stuffsacks in these bags for easy access.



Save eye-level shelves for other high-use items, like packs.

Dedicate the bottom shelf for footwear, so dirt won't fall on other shelves.

1. SORT

Take everything out. That's right, everything. You can't build organization on a mess. Divvy everything into four piles: Keep, Recycle, Donate, and Trash. Doesn't purging feel good?

2. SORT AGAIN

Now whittle the Keep pile into subcategories: packs, tents, bags and pads, footwear, stoves and cookware, and essentials (multitools, lights, batteries, bear canisters, etc.).

Divide specialized gear—like climbing and mountain biking equipment—into separate piles, too. Set aside the larger items and stow the remaining piles in see-through, stackable, plastic tubs (\$7 at home improvement stores) with labels.

3. MAP THE SPACE

If you don't have a designated closet for gear, you'll want to outline the boundaries of your gear space with chalk. Be sure to accommodate doors, access to electrical outlets,

and your car (with open doors and hatch). If you don't already have shelving, measure out the length your space can accommodate. (You can get basic shelving units for less than \$100.) Consider installing a pegboard or affixing a ceiling rack to use extra space.

4. ASSIGN

Based on your chalk boundaries, determine where the shelving units, pegboards, and racks will go. Then, install. Respect the lines.

5. STORE

Before putting everything away, refer to the tips above to make sure your gear closet's organization is totally idiot-proof.

To see the pictured gear closet go from drab to fab, visit backpacker.com/gearstorage-upgrade.

NEXT MONTH
BACKCOUNTRY KITCHEN

CATCH ME IF YOU CAN

IN 1863, A LEGENDARY NAVAJO HEADMAN EVADED THE U.S. ARMY AND ESTABLISHED A HIDEOUT IN THE DESERT. DAVID ROBERTS GOES IN SEARCH OF THE SOUTHWEST'S BEST-KEPT SECRET.

PHOTO BY AIRPHOTO - JIM MARK

*No man's land:
The tortuous
canyonlands at the
foot of Arizona's
Navajo Mountain*

CANYON

THE MEN WHO SAVED THE NAVAJO

"The men are to be slain whenever and wherever they can be found. The women and children may be taken prisoners."

It was late in the fall of 1863 and these were the official orders given to Kit Carson, famed Indian hunter. Carson had been ordered to round up all the Navajos in the Southwest and march them into exile. There were holdouts, and Carson led mounted U.S. Army troops to pursue the refugees through the canyons and across the mesas near today's border between Arizona and Utah.

Among those resisters was a band of 17 men, women, and children led by a young headman named Hoskinini. They had a single horse, a rusty rifle, and 20 sheep among them. For several days, Hoskinini's party walked and ran, until they came to the banks of the San Juan River in full flood.

And there, they simply vanished. That's where the tale begins.

For three days, Carson's troops waited for the surging torrent to subside. On the fourth day, they gave up. In all likelihood, the fugitives crossed the San Juan by a secret ford. Navajo legend insists they escaped through a secret tunnel under the river.

Not long after, Hoskinini's people crossed back over the San Juan, then, for the next four and a half years, the small group hid out in what remains today one of the most rugged and remote corners of the Southwest. Through strategic raiding, hunting, and husbandry, Hoskinini nursed his people back to health and then to unprecedented prosperity. And though he lived on until 1909, Hoskinini never revealed the location of his hideout to any Anglo.

For 150 years, the hideout has remained hidden, as if the land itself wanted to keep the secret. Starting in the 1880s, prospectors searching for gold and silver probed that country, followed by explorers after 1900,

but to this day, no Anglo has discovered Hoskinini's sanctuary among the sandstone domes and slot canyons.

For more than two decades, I've studied the scraps of history and the threads of oral tradition about Hoskinini's escape, trying to piece together the lost legend.

I think I know where the hideout is.

IN 1863, AFTER 10 YEARS of murderous depredations on both sides—an era the Diné (as the Navajo call themselves) still refer to as the Fearing Time—the U.S. government came up with a final solution to the "Navajo problem." It was the brainchild of General James Henry Carleton, a fanatic of whom one historian wrote, "[He] believed it his duty and destiny as a good Christian gentleman to tame the 'savages.'" It was Carleton who gave Kit Carson the genocidal order to shoot the men on sight—an injunction Carson disobeyed.

Thousands of Navajos surrendered. Within weeks, they were launched on the Long Walk—a 300-mile procession to a small reservation in the eastern New Mexico plains called Bosque Redondo.

No one knows how many of the Diné escaped the roundup. In one of his dictated field reports, Carson acknowledged that some of the cannier natives had fled. Hoskinini, then about 35 years old, was the most accomplished among them. Nevertheless, Carson reassured General Carleton that vigorous pursuit would bring the "close this Summer, and forever, of the Navajo War."

Of the 9,000 Navajos who made the Long Walk to Bosque Redondo, at least 2,000 died within the next four and a half years. At the Bosque, some perished of starvation when the corn harvest failed two seasons in a row. One survivor later recalled, "The U.S. Army fed corn to its horses. Then, when the horses

discharged undigested corn in their manure, the Diné would dig and poke in the manure to pick out the corn." Some women were fatally inflicted with syphilis by the soldiers guarding them. Some exiles were killed trying to escape. Others killed themselves.

Carleton congratulated himself. "The Navajoes [sic] at [Bosque Redondo]," he wrote in an official dispatch in 1864, "are the happiest people I ever saw and are working well."

A MASSIVE DOME 10,387 feet high, Navajo Mountain is sacred to the Diné, who call it Naatsis'aán, or Head of Earth Woman. There, in the creation myth, Monster Slayer, one of the Hero Twins, was born. All hiking or climbing by Anglos on Navajo Mountain is forbidden today. But from the shelf beneath the peak on the southwest, Kettle Country looms in the distance. Its domes and canyons are arresting in their sandstone beauty, but they contain some of the most rugged terrain in the contiguous United States.

In 1925, Hoskinini's son, 5 years old at the time of the escape, told historian Charles Kelly that the hideout lay south of Navajo Mountain. Historian Robert S. McPherson further identifies the hideout as "deep in the remote recesses on the southern side of Navajo Mountain" where, "avoiding the normal watering places," the refugees drank "from rock basins filled with rainwater."

During the last 20 years, I've explored every side of Navajo Mountain except one—the intricate maze of domes and slot canyons that guides in the 1920s nicknamed Kettle Country. Few places in the Southwest are harder to get to. In the fall of 2013, I decided to have a look.

In late September, with my longtime companion in canyon sleuthing, Greg Child, I embarked on the search. Before our trip, several friends had asked me why I didn't hire a Navajo guide to lead us into the backcountry I hoped to explore. The answer is that there simply are no such folks available. Even the Navajos who live near the canyons seem to have little knowledge of them. With the road to Navajo Mountain now paved, the supermarkets of Tuba City are a lot more accessible than the cornfields of Kettle Country that once sustained the Diné.

Greg and I drove our rental SUV deep into the canyonlands of the Navajo Reservation. Rugged dirt roads branched everywhere, most of them ending at isolated houses where some of the more traditional Diné live today. It was impossible to navigate. I flagged down a car that was creeping toward us from the west. Two young Navajo men got out. I asked for directions to a trailhead just north of the maze in which Greg and I hoped to find the hideout.

"You're in the wrong place," the shorter of the two men said, squinting at me. "There ain't no trail there." The subtext was tangible: You are not welcome here. We had a permit to hike on the reservation, but such a scrap of paper is no guarantee against the deep-seated hostility of locals who rarely see Anglos on their land.

We pushed on for another half mile to a pile of large boulders that barred further progress



Standing proud: A photo of Hoskinini taken only five weeks before he died in 1909. His followers used to say of him "He can almost kill you with his eyes."

except on foot and parked there. Expecting to find water on account of recent rains, we set out carrying only 2 liters apiece. But when we crossed a pair of major side canyons only to find them dry, we were forced to dump our loads, hike back to the car, and pack up the 5 gallons of water we had left there. We made camp on a shelf between the canyons and cooked in the dark. It was a splendid night, with the Milky Way striping the sky from the southwest horizon to where it collided with Navajo Mountain at our backs.

The next morning, we groaned under 70-pound loads as we hiked 1,800 feet down toward the canyon on the near edge of the labyrinth where I thought Hoskinini's crew might have found refuge.

I based this assumption on the story Hoskinini's son, Hoskinini-begay, told Charles Kelly in 1925. As he described the fugitives' flight from Carson's troops, he said, "We traveled many nights, sleeping in the daytime. We were all footsore and hungry, as we had not brought any food. We lived mostly on grass seed and sometimes a rabbit... The country was very rough and we were all worn out climbing down into deep canyons and out again. Water was very hard to find."

As we zigzagged our way into yet another dry, thorny creekbed, Greg suddenly stopped in his tracks. "Look," he said, raising his binoculars. "Hogan." We approached. The design was classic Diné, the walls forming a hexagon of juniper cribbing rising 6 feet toward a central smokehole in the roof. The narrow door faced dead east, and a girdle of sandstone blocks protected the walls from weather or collapse. The logs, we saw, had been hewn with an axe, and not a single nail had been used in the construction. I had seen enough old hogans to know that this one almost surely dated to the 19th century. Could this refuge have been the work of Hoskinini's people?

A couple of hours later, when we got to our basecamp canyon, we found pool after pool of fresh, clear rainwater—enough to drink for months. We pitched our tents and stared around us, imagining the 17 holdouts hunkered down in this sanctuary.

HOSKININI-BEGAY'S INTERVIEW with Charles Kelly tantalized me for years with its vague yet specific clues. He recalled that despite constant hunger, his father forbade the slaughtering of any of the sheep, so that they might breed and multiply. "We had no bullets for the old rifle," remembered the son, "and hunted in the old way"—with bow and arrow. Even so, wild game was scarce, so the fugitives gathered seeds and piñon nuts to sustain them through the first winter.

"He drove everyone all day long and would never let us rest, knowing that we might starve," Hoskinini-begay said. "He always seemed to be angry with everyone for being lazy. So he was given the name Hush-kaaney, which means 'the angry one.'"

As they fled, Hoskinini searched for the perfect oasis to anchor the survival ordeal he knew was coming. But in the end, it was not he who chose. "Finally we reached the south end

"HE DROVE EVERYONE ALL DAY LONG AND WOULD NEVER LET US REST."

of Navajo Mountain and came to a nice little stream with grass," Hoskinini-begay recounted. "Mother sat on the ground and said she would go no farther. We made camp there, and lived in that place."

The cold months came and went. Heartened that they had passed the first winter without a single death, the fugitives dared to build their hogans. They found batches of stray sheep and drove them back to the hideout, and on far-reaching raids they stole horses from unsuspecting soldiers at outposts. On their forays, the men also found other solitary fugitives and brought them into the sanctuary. In those four and a half years, just one stranger stumbled upon the hideout—a "renegade Ute," said Hoskinini-begay, "who did not betray us."

OUR BASECAMP OCCUPIED a sagebrush bench next to the clear pools of "Water Under the Rocks," as the Navajo call the canyon we had entered. Orange domes, gleaming in the low-angle sunrise, surrounded our camp on all sides. As we peered west down the shallow canyon, we could see its bends deepening and twisting out of sight in the distance.

That second day, we discovered another pair of hogans built in the same design as the first one we found, equally well-preserved, and also crafted by axe. The third, tucked under a sheer cliff 200 yards from our tents, was the most perfect of all. Hexagonal in shape, 12 feet in diameter, 6 feet high at the smokehole, it bore the imprint, in the furred ends of each juniper log, of loving craftsmanship. There are many ancient hogans scattered across the Navajo reservation, most of them in ruins. These three were the best preserved I had ever seen.

Even today, Navajos rarely build their hogans close together. The three we discovered lay as much as 2 miles apart. But this would have been the norm for Hoskinini's people; even while they hid out from the soldiers together, each family planted its own corn, gathered wild plants, and hunted game. According to anthropologist Stephen C. Jett, Navajo settlement patterns are rooted in their legacy as Athapaskan hunter-gatherers in the Canadian subarctic, where "sparse, scattered resources" made spreading out an optimal strategy. Once the Diné became sheep herders, that dispersal was reinforced.

One thing was clear to me, however: The valley bottom of Water Under the Rocks did not fit Hoskinini-begay's description of the center of the sanctum, for there was no "nice little stream with grass."

From studying the maps, I formed a hunch that the place might lie in another, broader canyon 3 miles west of our basecamp. The maps also made it clear that to get from here to there would require difficult routefinding—if we could make it at all.

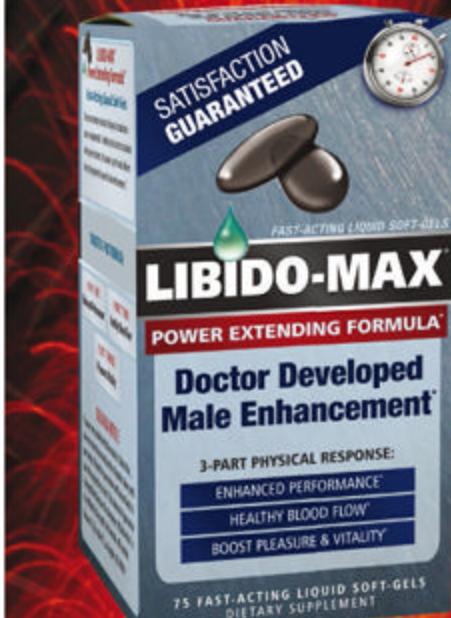
Sixteen years earlier, on an eight-day llama trek on the seldom-used Rainbow Bridge Trail that goes west and north of Navajo Mountain, I had caught a distant glimpse of this slickrock maze that had confirmed my belief that there was no more tortured topography anywhere in the Southwest. In 1922, an archeologist also glimpsed this trackless labyrinth from afar and wrote: "[It] might be likened to a sea driven in the teeth of a hurricane, the waves of which at their height had been transfixed to salmon-colored stone." The challenge of negotiating it, as we sought to retrace Hoskinini's phantom passage, might now prove too much for us.

Greg and I set off early on our third day to explore the maze. The sky was still blue, but a biting wind out of the southwest grew through the hours until it was almost a gale. The bends of Water Under the Rocks forced us in and out of slots as we improvised bypasses on the steep arroyo banks that crisscrossed our path. An hour into our wandering, Greg pointed at a tiny rock set atop a boulder. "Look at that," he said. "It's a Navajo cairn."

BY 1868, IT WAS CLEAR the Bosque Redondo was a miserable failure—even Carleton's own officers had begun to deride the squalid camp, calling it "Fair Carletonia." The government freed the surviving Navajos. Without horses, they had to reverse the 300-mile walk to regain their homeland. Each adult was given a pitiful allowance on which

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to build a new life: two sheep and some seeds for planting. "They had nothing else," remembered Hoskinini-begay. "Even their peach trees had been cut down." The leaders of the returning tribe, Manuelito and Barboncito, were broken men.

On discovering that the captured Navajos had returned to their homeland, Hoskinini's band came out of hiding. Their numbers had swelled, and they had an abundance of corn from fields they had planted. The refugees returning from the Bosque were stunned. They knew that Hoskinini's people had escaped the roundup, but not whether they were alive, let alone that they had become, as Hoskinini-begay claimed, "the richest Navahos [sic] in the whole country."

At once, Hoskinini gave those Diné corn, sheep, wool, and skins from the vast store he had accumulated during the years in hiding. Out of awe and gratitude, the refugees bestowed on Hoskinini a second nickname—"The Generous One."

SOON WE CAME ACROSS other single-stone cairns, widely spaced. And gradually we found the overgrown trails that linked the Diné route-markers. Each vestigial patch of trail was strewn with desiccated sheep and horse dung—not from 150 years ago, but evidently many decades old.

A mile and a half from camp, Water Under the Rocks plunged into an impassable slot. From the map, I deduced that we were still another 1.5 miles east of the broader canyon that might have contained the "nice little stream with grass" of Hoskinini's sanctuary. We struck out instead toward the south, the only direction that looked passable.

Almost at once, we hit another slot. This one pinched too tight to squeeze through. "Looks like we're boxed in," I said to Greg. Frustration and defeat throbbed in my shoulders. But then we noticed an unpromising, narrow corridor angling southwest. "What have we got to lose?" I muttered, as we entered the darkened ravine between vertical walls so close together you could almost span them with open arms. The fissure threatened to close off at any moment, but it went and went. Then we found another one-stone cairn, followed by a downed tree trunk in which someone had hacked foot-holds with an axe.

The slot led us on. From the map, I could see that we were close to the bigger canyon, and then Greg crowed, "It goes!"

We burst out of the crevice into the main canyon, then followed it northward. Twice we had to chimney across deep pools, but within half a mile, the canyon opened up. Now we had easy hiking on the sandbar, and on either side, broad terraces of alluvium hinted at fields where corn would grow. We walked beside a nice, little stream tufted with grass on either side.

I knew better than to hope to find relics here from Hoskinini's time. Nomads are notoriously hard to detect archaeologically, since they take their posses-

sions with them. There was no way to prove that this was Hoskinini's sanctuary without an archaeologist taking a core from a juniper log in one of the hogans and dating it to between 1863 and 1868. But obtaining such permission could prove bureaucratically unfeasible.

Yet everything we had found seemed to fit Hoskinini-begay's description of the hideout. On our two-day approach, we could agree that "the country was very rough and we were all worn out climbing down into deep canyons and out again. Water was very hard to find." The "nice little stream with grass" was an apt characterization of the far point we had reached where the canyon broadened. If I had to hide out for almost five years in the Southwest, and I knew how to live off the land as those resourceful Navajos had, Kettle Country was the place I would have chosen.

But now it was 2:30 p.m. and the darkening sky threatened rain, while the wind shrieked between the high surrounding walls. Our time was up. We took a long last look and turned back in our tracks, walking out of history.

ON OUR LAST MORNING in Kettle Country, I lapsed into a reverie, as I traveled back in time to 1865 and into the head of a young man in Hoskinini's group.

Was the corn in the field two benches away ripe for picking? Should I stir the fire to life in the hogan, or save the piñon sticks? How soon would the first snows fall? And will tomorrow be the day I scan the horizons and see the silhouettes of soldiers who will march down and kill us all?

The reverie faded. Greg and I are modern Anglos, not 19th-century Diné. We were intruders here. We had found our way in, but we could never have begun to scratch a living out of this country. The skills of Hoskinini's people were beyond our ken. We had penetrated this wilderness in search of adventure and discovery—a far different thing from survival.

Still, I mused, for all the worries that had daily plagued the Diné, they must have basked in the wholeness of their freedom here. They lived in the old way, as they did before the coming of the Europeans. The world the Hero Twins had saved by turning monsters into stone was theirs.

It was Hoskinini who made that world possible. He was at once the Angry One and the Generous One. If he could almost kill you with his eyes, he could also nurture the weak and the despairing. In the wilderness, Hoskinini surely never doubted that his people would survive and flourish. In his fierce pride and visionary faith, he became the legend that many Diné still invoke at dawn, in the doors

of their hogans, as they pray to the rising sun. ■

PHOTOS
View images
from the author's
journey at [backpacker.com/
hoskinini](http://backpacker.com/hoskinini).

David Roberts tells the complete tale of Hoskinini in his latest book, *The Lost World of the Old Ones*, published this month by W.W. Norton and Company.

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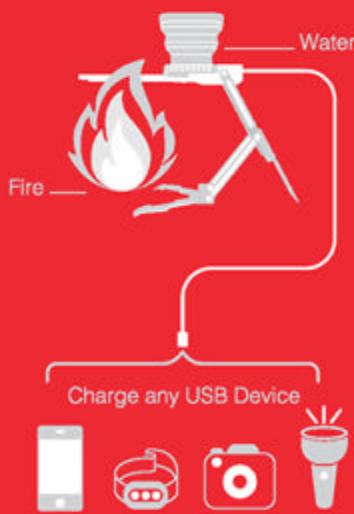
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photo / Jacob W. Frank



Cathedral Peak Yosemite National Park, California

Summit one of the grandest peaks in the Sierra Nevada on a nontechnical dayhike.

Famous admirer

"Yonder stands one of Nature's cathedrals, hewn from the living rock..."
—John Muir, *My First Summer In the Sierra*

Primo basecamping

Take the John Muir Trail from the Cathedral Lakes trailhead and veer west near mile 2.8 to reach Lower Cathedral Lake. Camping is allowed (permit required) 200 feet away from the water.

North ridge

This catwalk connects the peak's summit block to Eichorn's Pinnacle (it requires a class 4 scramble).

True summit

Cathedral Peak's high point is out of the frame, behind the photographer.

50 ft.
40 ft.
30 ft.
20 ft.
10 ft.
0 ft.

Climb the Pinnacle

It's actually lower than Cathedral's true summit, but 50-foot-high Eichorn's Pinnacle tempts climbers with its crazy exposure and routes of varying difficulty (5.4 and up). [Info bit.do/Eichorns](http://Info.bit.do/Eichorns)

10,912 ft.

Total height

919 ft.

Prominence

Get here

Option 1: Mountaineer's Route

Take the path John Muir used to record this peak's first ascent in 1869. Start on his namesake trail, heading southwest from the Cathedral Lakes trailhead. About 10 minutes in, split off on a well-worn climber's path and take it about 3 miles to the base of the Southeast Buttress. Circle counterclockwise across scree to find class 3 and 4 slopes to the north ridge. Turn left; follow the ridge to a point just below Cathedral's summit (the last 15 feet require technical climbing).

Option 2: Climber's Choice

Conquer the Southeast Buttress. It's about five pitches of roughly 5.6 trad climbing covering about 700 vertical feet to Cathedral Peak's true summit.

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